

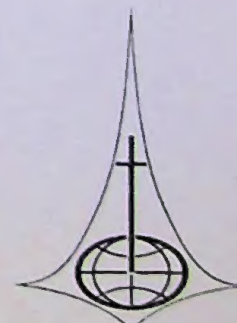


LWF
INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S
PRE-ASSEMBLY
GATHERING

Report

Montreux, Switzerland
14-17 November 2002

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION







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CONTENTS

I.	FOREWORD	9
II.	GREETINGS Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko General Secretary, LWF, Geneva, Switzerland.	11
	GREETINGS Rev. Dr Rasolondraibe Director, Department for Mission & Development, LWF Geneva, Switzerland.	13
III.	FROM HONG KONG TO WINNIPEG: A SIX YEAR REPORT (1997-2002) Priscilla Singh Executive Secretary, WICAS/LWF Geneva, Switzerland.	15
IV.	FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD Message from the LWF International Women's Pre-Assembly Gathering.	21
V.	RESOURCES	
	FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD: A THEOLOGICAL IMPETUS Rev. Dr Isabelle Graesslé Moderator, Protestant Church of Geneva, Switzerland.	27
	CONTEXTUAL STRATEGIES FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD: THE POWER OF GLOBAL SOCIAL SOLIDARITY Dr Musimbi Kanyoro General Secretary, World YWCA, Geneva, Switzerland.	31
VI.	VILLAGE GROUP THEMES AND DISCUSSIONS	
1.	GOD'S HEALING GIFT OF JUSTICATION Rev. Dr Eva Vogel-Mfato Conference of European Churches (CEC), Geneva, Switzerland.	39
2.	GOD'S HEALING GIFT OF COMMUNION Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist Director, DTS/LWF Geneva, Switzerland.	43
3.	HEALING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ONE CHURCH Rev. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Geneva, Switzerland.	47
4.	MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN MULTI-FAITH CONTEXTS Dr Aruna Gnanadason World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.	51

- | | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 5. | REMOVING BARRIERS THAT EXCLUDE
Ms Tania Engel
Durban, South Africa | 55 |
| 6. | THE HEALING SERVICE OF THE CHURCH
Dr Tamara Tatsenko
St Petersburg, Russia | 59 |
| 7. | JUSTICE AND HEALING IN FAMILIES
Ms Inger-Lise Olsen
Church of Sweden, Uppsala, Sweden | 63 |
| 8. | OVERCOMING VIOLENCE
Ms Linda-Post Bushkofsky
Women of ELCA, Chicago, USA. | 67 |
| 9. | TRANSFORMING ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION
Rev. Sandra Bach
Germany | 71 |
| 10. | HEALING CREATION
Ms Katia Maria Cortez
The Nicaraguan Church of Faith and Hope
Managua, Nicaragua | 77 |

VII. BIBLE STUDIES

- | | |
|---|----|
| HEALING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP
Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari
Vice-President LWF | 81 |
| HEALING THROUGH SPIRITUALITY
Ms Jennie Nordin
Sweden | 89 |
| HEALING THROUGH JUSTICE
Rev. Patricia Cuyatti
Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lima, Peru | 93 |
| HEALING THROUGH PEACE BUILDING
Ms Loe-Rose Mbise
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Arusha, Tanzania | 97 |

VIII. LITURGIES

- | | |
|---|-----|
| Opening Worship: HEALING THROUGH SPIRITUALITY
Rev. Dr Brigitte Enzner-Probst, Germany | 103 |
|---|-----|

	HEALING IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP	109
	Ms Abigail Zang, USA	
	HEALING THROUGH COMMUNITY HEALING	113
	Ms Ruth Vince, Canada	
	HEALING THROUGH JUSTICE	115
	Lic. Aurelia Scholler, Argentina	
	HEALING THROUGH RITUALS	117
	Ms Esther Lam, Hong Kong	
	HEALING THROUGH BUILDING PEACE	121
	Rev. Marie Barnett, Sierra Leone	
IX.	PROGRAM SCHEDULE	125
X.	LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	127

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
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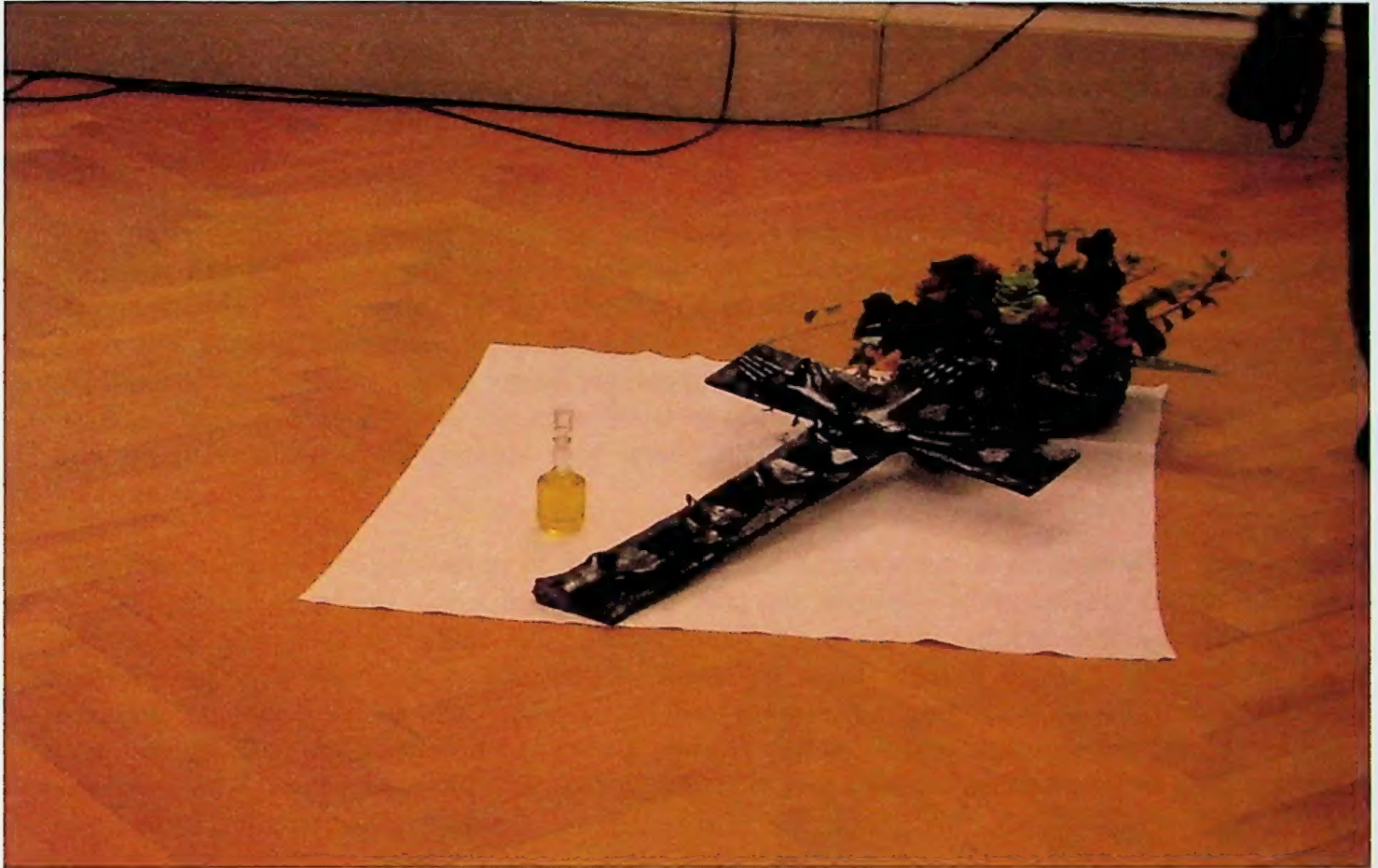
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FOREWORD

The LWF resolutions and commitments made at the Seventh Assembly in Budapest in 1984 and the LWF Eight Assembly in Curitiba in 1990 have paved way for Women's full involvement in shaping the profile and living expressions of the Lutheran Communion. The International Consultations that have been held so far been either **for** Women or **on** Women. In 2002, the LWF Global Consultation took the form of a "Pre-Assembly Women's Gathering" which brought together the WICAS Regional Coordinators with women leaders and a few women Assembly delegates to discuss on the The LWF Assembly theme "For the healing of the World".

The intention for this global gathering is to bring a concerted focus to the assembly theme from the life experiences of women working with women and by holding other leadership responsibilities. Their message has then been shared and multiplied in the Regional Pre Assembly Consultations held in all the regions; Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America where women gathered to discuss their regional dimensions of issues. These eventually will be articulated at the LWF Assembly and would lead to the process of making commitments that would shape the work of the LWF till the next assembly.

This report is only a compilation of the thinking and expressions on the assembly theme and on the ten village group topics from women who are involved very actively in the life and witness of the Church. Their articulation yielded to lively group discussions, finally manifesting in a Message in a nutshell. What the report cannot capture however, is the richness of the liturgies that were used, the diverse cultural heritage of this dynamic communion, the wealth of women's caring and the true feeling of oneness that permeated the entire event! Those unique and valuable experiences live in the hearts and fill us with a sense of oneness and a common purpose.

I invite you therefore to enjoy this contribution coming from the diverse regions, a foretaste of what it means to be an inclusive global communion, what it means to be united in fellowship, in trust and openness, in anticipation and in respect for the "Healing of the World".

Priscilla Singh,
Executive Secretary
Women in Church and Society
Department for Mission and Development
Lutheran World Federation.

GREETINGS

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko

The General Secretary, LWF, Geneva, Switzerland

I greet all of you who represent a number of countries, churches and a number of concerns. The Assembly of the LWF will be held in July 2003, in Winnipeg, a prairie city in Canada. This is the 10th LWF Assembly, which means that there have been 9 other assemblies before. Every Assembly is a unique event, a corner stone and a milestone in the life and work of the member churches of the LWF. They are corner stones because they lay a foundation of decisions we take together, on which we build our life together into the future. They are a milestone because they mark a place in our history together that we shall not go back to, but proceed beyond.

The First Assembly in 1947 held in Lund, Sweden was unique and a milestone because it was the first one in the 20th century meeting for the first time after the second world war. In a context of the world saturated with hatred, fear, animosity, suspicion and lack of cooperation, a small group of people from a limited number of countries came together to nurture and foster a relationship of which we are a part today. The next Assembly in Winnipeg will be a unique one and a milestone too because it is again the first one in the 21st century. The context is different because we meet at a time of globalization, in a world which is totally different from 1947, where there is integration, progress made in other spheres of life, but also much fragmentation. A world where there are 6 billion people of which 3 billion have used the telephone in one form or another and another 3 billion who have never used or received a telephone call. It is a world where there is enormous wealth in a few parts of the world and yet incredible poverty in other parts of the world. There are a lot of breakdown not only in families, but individually too. We are in the midst of debates about democracy and about International governance. There is also in the LWF, debates about the future of the assemblies. A few say that we should not have these assemblies anymore. Yet the Church by nature, is an assembly of people. otherwise we cease to be Church.

We shall also be meeting in the context of a "Decade to Overcome Violence". This also creates our context in Winnipeg. The LWF, through DMD, WICAS Desk has made a very humble contribution in the ongoing discussion and efforts to overcome violence. The document "Churches say No to Violence Against Women" is a contribution towards the debate not only at the level of churches but also at the level of society. We have shared the document with the United Nations.

We are meeting in the context where the children's situation cannot be described in words, but only with tears. Only three weeks ago at an Interfaith Summit sponsored by LWF in Johannesburg, I heard a young Liberian who had been a child soldier telling us his painful stories. At the age of 15, he was kidnapped into being a child soldier in Sierra Leone and he, along with other child soldiers, had to take weapons and drugs every day in order to keep their courage to kill their colleagues.

We are meeting in the context where indigenous people are crying for justice. When one looks at the legislation on land rights in the countries where these people live, they are so complicated that it is so difficult for them to really understand how one possess or is dispossessed of their rights to ownership of land. We live in the context of questions and discussions about an inclusive church. What does it mean that we are a communion of

churches? what does it mean that we are in partnership between man and woman? What does it mean that in 1984 in Budapest, the LWF declared itself a communion of churches?

A little less that 1/3 of our churches are still not ordaining women which is an issue at the level of the LWF. The whole question of including others who have different sexual preferences, no matter how we may think, is a reality of the churches today. How to handle it is an issue that is before us. We are meeting in a context, where every segment of our society is crying for peace. Prayers for peace are needed as much as initiatives for peace, living peace, being peace makers and peace keepers.

As we move forward to the Assembly on the theme "For the Healing of the World", we hear echoes from the Gospel "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only begotten Son". The point is that the Love of God is directed to the world. We, churches sometimes use the love of God as our own property and inflict punishment on the world by withholding God's love from the world occasionally and yet God's love is for the world. To be a church is to communicate and to live out God's love for the world. So the theme "For The healing of the World" is challenging for us in this Assembly. It means finding a language, a vocabulary by which we can speak out from among 73 countries which can bring healing among ourselves, so that we can become a healing community. How can we speak to each other in such a way that in the end, we can act together for the sake of changing attitudes? Unless we find a vocabulary that unites us, binds us together, we will not be able to act together because we will not understand each other. The moment we are able to understand and act together, attitudes will change. The whole idea when the Department for Mission and Development was founded was to change attitudes in our own lives to become a healing community.

The Assembly is a unique event, a corner stone, a milestone. There is newness about every Assembly because 2/3 of the participants are new. 1/3 are from the previous assembly; there is continuity and discontinuity and there is newness. The Assembly in Winnipeg will never be a unique event unless the Pre-Assemblies are unique, because the pre-assemblies bring something into the life of the Assembly. The process of the Assembly does not begin on the 21st of July in Winnipeg, but the Assembly began on the first day of Women's Pre-Assembly Gathering where women struggle with the issues to bring before the Assembly. I thank the women for their deliberations and say "Welcome" to Winnipeg.

GREETINGS

Rev. Dr Péri Rasolondraibe

Director, Department for Mission and Development, LWF, Geneva, Switzerland

I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I also like to bring greetings to you on behalf of my colleagues in the Department for Mission & Development, DMD being the Department responsible for the Pre-Assembly Consultations. We congratulate you for being the first to start a series of seven Pre-Assembly Consultations and we wish you successful and constructive gatherings.

First of all, what is the purpose of these Pre-Assembly Consultations? The main purpose is to prepare, equip and empower delegates for full participation in and meaningful contribution to the Assembly. An assembly is a big event in itself. There will be more than 400 delegates, but there will be other than delegates in an assembly. About 1,000 people or more will be moving around the assembly hall. It will be easy to get lost in such a crowd!

There will be all kinds of debates on theological and social issues and other concerns that it will be easy to get confused. There will be different ways of doing things from how we do in our churches. The rules of procedure are different. Thus, the channels through which to present our views and our findings are different. The way we see and discuss issues are different from churches to churches. Hence it is easy to get confused in such a big event. It is therefore one of the main objectives of Pre-Assembly Consultations to see to it that every delegate knows what to do, when to do it, where and why and how to do it. This is why we have Pre-Assembly Consultations.

The Women's Pre-Assembly Consultation is a special one in the sense that not all who participate in it are going to be in Winnipeg but all the participants have the chance to influence what is going to happen in Winnipeg. We have brought church leaders, women resource persons, some delegates and some Council members to talk together and to think from the perspective of women in church and society about the assembly theme: "For the Healing of the World".

Those who participate as delegates will attend Regional Pre-Assembly Consultations. One day is set aside during these consultations to meet as women delegates. It is hoped that all the women delegates from the region will attend. Those of who were present at the Global Pre-Assembly here are expected to bring what you have discussed, your findings, into that one day seminar and discuss them together with others so that they will be prepared to contribute effectively in the Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation.

Dr Noko reminded that this meeting does not end here, but continues in the Regional Pre-Assembly Consultations and then continues into the Assembly itself. This Consultation is a forerunner to the Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation, but at the same time women are preparing for their contribution to the Assembly in Winnipeg. So, women are doing two things at the same time.

The Regional Pre-Assembly Consultations will take place as follows:

1. North America Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation: 23-26 January 2003 in Denver, Colorado, USA.
2. European Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation: 23-26 February 2003 in Vienna, Austria.

3. Asia Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation: 02-06 March 2003 in Medan, Indonesia.
4. Africa Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation: 23-26 March 2003 in Nairobi, Kenya.
5. Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation:
06-09 April 2003 in San Salvador, El Salvador, Central America.

These Regional Pre-Assembly Consultations, except for Europe, will be held at the same time as church leadership conferences. We invite all the leadership of churches in that region to attend, not only church leaders (Bishops or Presidents) but church leadership, which includes women and youth. These consultations will also discuss regional matters.

After the above mentioned consultations, there will be one more, a special one that will close this series: the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC). It is called a conference because during this gathering the youth will also look at the next 6 years and make proposals for the LWF Youth program. During the Regional Pre-Assembly Consultations youth delegates will also meet separately to prepare for the PAYC and the Assembly itself.

Pre-Assembly Consultations do not report directly to the Assembly. Assembly resolutions normally come from village group discussions and from Plenary discussions. The Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation briefs the delegates on the rules of procedure and on how an Assembly works, so that they will know when to bring their findings through the right channels. It is not sufficient for the Pre-Assembly Consultation or in the Regional ones to put something on paper. We have to carry those findings through the different channels, in the village groups, in the Bible studies, everywhere.

At the Pre-Assembly Consultations the delegates will also prepare the Bible study presentation. The Bible study is an exciting part of the Assembly. It will not be presented just by one person standing in front and lecturing. The whole region will present the Bible study on stage in the form of a sketch or a play. In Hong Kong, for instance, the Nordic churches had a small clown presenting the Bible study for them. Africa had all the delegates do something together on stage as well as involving the whole audience. This is a very powerful way of impacting people. Since women delegates will have one day meeting prior to the Regional Pre-Assembly Consultation they need to pay attention and contribute to the Bible study presentation. Women findings here should find its way in how the Bible study will be presented. That is a way to move the whole Assembly to understand what it means to be "For the Healing of the World".

It has been arranged to meet with my colleagues from the Area Desks. On the one hand women should ask what is going on, what is DMD doing in the regions that will help women deliberations. On the other hand women should share what do they wish to take place in the Regional Pre-Assembly Consultations.

I would like to introduce to you from Africa, the Area Secretary, Dr. Musa Filibus from Nigeria (in Nairobi now and I will take his place). From Asia, we have Rev. Ginda Harahap, Indonesia. From Europe, Dr. Andreas Wöhle, the Netherlands. From Latin America and the Caribbean, Rev. Martin Junge from Chile.

**FROM HONG KONG TO WINNIPEG:
A Six Year Report (1997-2002)
Ms Priscilla Singh, Executive Secretary
Desk for "Women in Church and Society", LWF, Geneva**

Everything is possible to the one who believes"; Mark 9: 23.

I. INTRODUCTION

We live in a context where competing interests increasingly use world religions to maintain or secure political influence or to repress sections of people. Religion has become a weapon for war and control. This brings three major challenges to faith communities:

- 1. To redeem religion from its triumphalistic and hierarchical tendency that tends to brand and exclude.*
- 2. To reexamine whether religion is being used for repression or for liberation for all.*
- 3. To emphasize that religion and religious communities particularly our LWF Communion could be a powerful tool for building and promoting life, for empowering and engaging people to live in just and inclusive communion.*

The LWF IXth Assembly in Hong Kong had set us an agenda and the following are the ways they were programmatically responded to.

II. REGIONAL COORDINATION

As a new creation we are called to a new reality of gender equality. The 14 regional coordinators of WICAS spread in different regions stand witness to thinking globally through their networking and acting locally through programs, visits, representations and lobbying in and through churches and regional networks. Together, they are the living proof that connections can be made between people and issues, local and global, and that from these connections, policies and strategies can be formulated. The meeting of the regional coordinators called by WICAS in 2000, clearly identified issues of each region and strategies provided by WICAS network in addressing them programmatically. The meeting also analyzed and streamlined the sub regional division to flow with the regional coordination of area desks for greater visibility, impact and effectiveness. Some of the region specific foci and responses that were made are as follows:

A. Challenges in African Region

There is a great need to acknowledge and utilize women's commitment and expertise in peace building, reconciliation and conflict resolution. The churches must demonstrate their solidarity with women by first appointing and then strengthening the liaison persons and the women's desks with adequate infrastructure and funds, and by entrusting women with more autonomy and decision making powers. More long-term strategies are needed to develop women theologians in and from Africa.

Responses

Programs that were held in the region therefore concentrated on engendering structures, training of trainers, female genital mutilation and the gender dimension of AIDS that accentuates worst suffering for women who not only bear the burden of infection and caring for the afflicted but much more. The practice of polygamy, wife inheritance, denial of property rights to widows, the more horrendous raping of girl babies and children to find a cure for HIV/AIDS through rank ignorance, are realities in a few parts of the region. The

sensitive issue of female genital mutilation was attended to not as a cultural or religious issue but as a practice that affects the health of women and children.

B. Challenges in Asian Region

In addition to the challenge of living in multi-faith realities, women's experiences within the church range from apathy, resistance, an open rejection of feminist views, to maintaining a culture of silence or culturally correct space for women. The increase of violence against women and the cultural demand to continue to serve as nurturers as well as providers and home makers cast a triple burden on women. Working in sub-regions therefore assumes greater importance.

Responses

In the North East Asian region, concentration was on encouraging and building network of women, especially among the Chinese speaking churches. In the South East Asian Lutheran Communion, it was on renewing ties that have been strained due to conflicts and in training of pastor's wives. In the West South Asian region, the issue of violence against women and the extent of its manifestations within the church was heard by church leadership who are now convinced that they need to further concentrate on this issue in the near future. Gender analysis was therefore used as a priority in the training of college students, youth leaders and pastors.

C. Challenges in European Region

In most parts of Europe, gender equality, an outcome of national governance is a reality. But this has created in some places 'gender blindness' in reverse. Violence against women and trafficking of women and girls are a reality. Though there is a spiritual quest it is not sought through the established churches. There is much demand for fresh exploration for Christian and Lutheran identity, spirituality, the value of family and life orientation as they influence our daily living and witnessing.

Responses

The whole region concentrated through workshops, on the issue of domestic violence and particularly on trafficking of women. All the sub regions jointly had a program on "Spirituality-Obstacle or Help towards Reconciliation" mainly concentrating on building bridges, highlighting the spirituality of eastern traditions and in formulating collectively a women's liturgy. Visitations and personal contacts gave fresh interests to be involved through the networking of WICAS.

D. Challenges in Latin American and the Caribbean Region

A felt need is to build self-esteem, and to popularize the understanding of gender equality with a solid theological basis and practice. Increased economic instability, debt crisis and political upheavals are a great set back to the churches. An increasing child birthrate per woman and an increasing number of female headed, single-parent households necessitate further concentration on capacity building of women to be providers, popularize Planned Parenthood, and caring for children.

Responses

Several women's gatherings initiated by WICAS clearly identified that increasing impoverishment due to debt trap and economic globalization increases domestic violence. So women are organizing themselves to address more and more, the diverse manifestations of violence, to reread the Bible and to rediscover gender neutral terms to reclaim the lost

inclusiveness through WICAS coordination. They have also identified that gender questions need to be a required aspect in any program and have requested for a re-look at lectionary so that gender consciousness is in-built into the theology and practice of the churches.

E. Challenges in Northern American Region

It is a felt need to build bridges between the first-wave feminists the second and the third generation feminists as well as to encourage young women who care less for all these struggles. Building up leadership of young women to be involved in the ministries of the church and to develop a global consciousness is one of the many needs of the Caribbean region also. Networking and providing information that would help the women to be the voices of the marginalized continues to be a great challenge.

Responses

Therefore efforts were made in building and mentoring young women for leadership as well as sharing of valuable knowledge and lobbying skills within the church structures to reduce violence against women.

III. MAINSTREAMING FOR AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNION

Gender Mainstreaming could be an appropriate move towards building a healed and healing, inclusive and holistic faith community as it brings women and men together to grapple with the constructions of gender that fixes limited roles and responsibilities on both men and women. But prior to that, gender as term and as a concept needs to be fully grasped. Therefore the staff of LWF secretariat during their week of meetings in 2000 and the project committee members of DMD in 2001 discussed on the use of gender as an analytical tool as they minister in diverse ways to enhance just, sustainable and inclusive communities. Information was shared with the churches that apply for project funding that it is a LWF policy to generally give high priority to projects that educate and promote gender inclusiveness in all aspects of project planning, management and implementation.

F. Gender Training Manual

A gender-training manual could enable congregations to reexamine cultures, social structures economical systems that are limiting women as well as men to traditional spheres and accompany them in the process of analyzing the context in which they have to live and witness. Therefore a youth intern of WICAS, Ms. Karin Manz, was appointed to the task of collecting and collating training manuals from around the world. A workshop on designing a manual was initiated by WICAS in 2000 in Asia. The findings, was shared with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, who, together with ecumenical team would come up with a common, simple, brief and interactive module on gender training, suitable for congregations.

G. Engendering Theological Education

A Global Consultation was initiated by WICAS on the theme "*Engendering Theological Education for Transformation*" in Montreux, Switzerland from 5 to 8 November 2001. This was a follow up on the LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education held in Rome in August 1999 which emphasized "Curriculum development should be especially attentive to issues of contextualization, spirituality, the insight provided by feminist and other liberation perspectives, transformation and ecumenics."

¹ (LWF Global Consultation Theological Education Report, August 23-27, 1999, Rome, Italy, published by the Lutheran World Federation, page 21)

In the past two decades, the most prolific and proficient of inputs that have emerged from feminist theologians need to be integrated in theological disciplines to make them dynamic and transformatory. The Engendering Consultation therefore, focused on this issue and made an effort to come up with guidelines for integration of feminist perspectives in Biblical, Practical, systematic disciplines as well as explore new approaches. A core group was established to follow up on the deliberations and to work further on the issue of formulating guidelines for a curriculum that will be offered to the churches and seminaries for their consideration. Engendering also means 'giving birth to something new.' Therefore it is hoped that the collective energy and inputs would mobilize a re-visioning and reformulation of theological education that is relevant and life affirming.

H. Church's Worship as 'Central to its Witness'

While there is an increase in the number of worshipping communities in certain countries there is a decrease in a few others which brings to up several pertinent questions. One among them is "Are the lectionaries of the churches reflect and make appropriate the needs of this community and help in promoting an inclusive one?" An exploration has been attempted to by the youth intern of WICAS in 2001 to revisit some lectionaries to offer more scope for inclusivity. Interest has been kindled in some churches. Further explorations needs to be made in the near future.

IV. ADVOCACY

I. "Churches say No to Violence against Women"

The LWF Council at its 1999 meeting in Bratislava, took serious note of the increasing violence against women and voted:

"To encourage all member churches to face the painful issue of violence against women in all its manifestations particular to their context," and "to ask the Desk for Women in Church and Society to propose ways to accompany the churches in their efforts to address the issue."

In response, the Desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) developed a first draft, "*Churches say NO to Violence against Women*" shared with and shaped by several groups of men and women from member churches. In view of the urgency of the situation, the LWF Council at its June 2000 meeting in Turku, Finland, recommended that this draft document be shared without any further delay with member churches, seminaries, special interest groups and ecumenical organizations requesting their response, additional inputs, local manifestations and positive action plans that they have formulated to reduce violence.

Some churches delegated the task of giving responses to their women's group, a few appointed special committees or persons to review the document. A few had it translated for greater impact and a few national and regional church leadership meetings included the issue in their agenda and gave their response. There was a great global demand for additional distributions of the documents. Some women's groups took it as their main agenda in their programs and seminars. Responses included positive affirmations of the document and commendations of the process the LWF has taken in a concerted way. General and specific theological, psychological, cultural inputs and descriptions of positive actions already taken by the churches were sent back to WICAS. Some churches have formulated future programs and projects as an outcome of reacting to the document. One or two churches admitted that some of the global manifestations cited in the document might not be pertinent to their context. The Australian churchwomen's group even made the effort to rewrite the document to adapt it to their context.

Regional coordinators in Europe and North American Region worked out an international consultation on "Breaking the Silence of Violence against Women and children." and entreated the LWF "to use their skills in further addressing this issue with other agencies and organizations and to allocate ample resources for both immediate response and long term prevention." Women's groups in Slovakia, Jordan, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Germany, Argentina were enabled by WICAS to organize extensive seminars on the issue. Some church leaders have shared the document with government agencies. In one state in India it was introduced in the gender training of high-ranking police officials.

The LWF Council in 2001 also discussed the draft document in all program and standing committees, and voted "to receive the document with the provision that the responses and additional inputs received from the Program/Standing Committees and the LWF member churches be incorporated wherever possible." It further resolved that the LWF should "accompany member churches which want to translate the document into local languages, and facilitate distribution to all heads of churches, lay leaders, pastors in congregations in all member churches, seminaries and to women leaders as a matter of urgency."

The project Committee of DMD in their meeting in 2001 at Madagascar made the recommendation that "the issues of violence against women be given priority concern in all projects." Following this recommendation, the revised project application form of DMD bears the specific information that priority would be given to applications that discuss the issues of violence in order to reduce it.

The document has also been shared with the general secretaries and women leadership of all the Christian global communions in their international meetings. It is acknowledged that the LWF has been the first global communion to address the issue in a systematic and strategic manner involving the member churches thereby mobilizing a global process. The document was shared with the UN Special "Rapporteur" on Violence against Women as a sign of how religion could be used as a tool for liberation and the church's network could seriously and proactively and strategically participate in reducing all forms of violence against women.

While the churches contemplate further on the issue, WICAS continues to build capabilities of special groups and organizations, to counter particular local forms of violence like the female genital mutilation, trafficking of women and children, dowry system, all forms of domestic violence and offers a global impetus.

J. Ordination of Women

The Lutheran Communion can rightly claim a leading position as a global communion among the number of ordinations of women and in the number of leadership position of women as Bishops and Presidents. A few churches in the communion have celebrated 50 years and 25 years of ordained women's ministry. Yet there are women kept waiting for decades in some other churches. WICAS accompanies the churches that wish and seek to explore the possibilities of women's ordination and to work towards a communion in which all member churches acknowledge the ordination of women as 'a gift from God to Church.' Offering encouragement and opportunities for the theologically trained women to fully utilize their creative capabilities through yearly global and regional consultations. Assisting students in their particular field of research and its publication has been an accompaniment WICAS does on regular basis.

K. Economic Literacy

A paradigm shift in development initiatives from "targeting" women as objects of development to addressing them as empowered "actors of change" requires a leap of faith. Women not only need to be informed of the global economic changes and the local manifestations that affect them, but also to be involved more fully in addressing economic sustainability through providing information, involvement in sustainable development by developing their negotiation skills, increased productivity and bargaining capacity. WICAS has facilitated women's active involvement in the Jubilee 2000 campaign, and programmatically facilitates more sharing between women from north and south for better understanding and working together. Literacy about economic globalization and how it is manifested locally and the challenges it poses to women at grass roots and how women, could organize together to meet the challenges became part of our continued discussions. These are shared through the "Women" magazine that has become a resource for more than 3000 women and men.

V. ECUMENICAL ACTION TOGETHER

The Ecumenical Decade of Churches: in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) had not only created a global movement but also emphasized the need to continue to pool our energies and resources together for greater effectiveness. WICAS together with WCC and the World YWCA planned solidarity team visits to Liberia and Sierra Leone in 2000 to share their pains and to understand their coping mechanisms as listeners, reconcilers, and spokespersons to the rest of the world, seeking in turn, a global solidarity for them.

WICAS in and through Ecumenical women's network concertedly focuses in uplifting and affirming the positive contributions of religions and religious communities as religion is more and more seen as a tool for divisions and conflicts at the UN Commission on Status Women meetings. This also offered a platform to propagate, in proactive ways, how women of faiths can diffuse tensions and work together for transformation. Each year, women participants also learn further and share their knowledge in platforms made available through this UN process.

WICAS continued to have programmatic cooperation together with ecumenical women at local, regional and international areas in thematic workshops like, "Transforming theological education: Women in Leadership", "Peace with Justice: Women Speak" and through involving in Ecumenical Team visitation to Liberia and Sierra Leone. We observe the International Women's Day celebrations, World Day of Prayer and promote a Doctor of Ministry programs.

VI. CONCLUSION

Increasing religious extremism, global economic insecurities that diminishes funding, general apathy, and an emerging interest to put women back in old stereotyped roles are of grave concern to women around the world, and to the church women in particular. The LWF Assembly, women's strength of solidarity, and an abiding hope, infuses in WICAS greater courage, fresh insights and enthusiasm to continue in promoting an inclusive communion as we participate in and deliberate at the LWF Xth Assembly "For the Healing of the World"

FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD
Message from The Lutheran World Federation's
International Women's Pre-Assembly Gathering, November 14-17, 2002
Montreux, Switzerland

Introduction

The 10th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation **began with us**, the women gathered for the International Women's Pre-Assembly Consultation in Montreux, Switzerland in November 2002. Our voices are **now being carried to all the Pre-Assembly Consultations**. We, as participants of this Global Consultation rejoiced, wept and celebrated together on several aspects of healing; **through spirituality, through rituals in Christian tradition, through community building, justice and peace building and through healing in interpersonal relationships**. The many worship styles, liturgies and the sharing of blessings in a variety of ways including the Eucharist became an important aspect of experiencing the gifts of women and the richness as a communion. It also enabled us as women to name our wounds, to reflect on them to begin the healing process.

Diagnosis in Order to facilitate Healing

The call to be healed is heard even in the midst of our turbulent times. We recalled how Jesus wept when he saw the city of Jerusalem in its state of war, hunger, sickness and turmoil (Luke 19: 41-42). He saw **OPPORTUNITIES** for peace-building for the city and its people and wept because the people of Jerusalem **did not** see those opportunities. Therefore we emphasize that the wounds of the world **need not discourage us** but can help us to recognize opportunities for partnership with God in healing. With 'soft eyes' we are re-imagining the splendor of transformation which 'hardened eyes' do not see.

Naming the Wounds: There is no healing without naming what ails us. We, as women, name these wounds that spoil the image of God in us.

- **Violence:**

- *We reaffirm the LWF Council voting in 2001 that "We urge the member churches to translate the document "Churches say NO to Violence Against Women" into local languages, and facilitate distribution to all heads of churches, lay leaders, pastors in congregations in all member churches, seminaries and to women leaders as a matter of urgency" We request the following aspects of it be paid particular attention to:*

- *Domestic violence*
- *Clergy Abuse*
- *Institutional Violence and*
- *Trafficking of Women and Children*

- *We urge the churches to play a proactive role in mobilizing support for the reduction of weapons of mass destruction through out the world and to persistently keep up the vision that there is power in non-violence and it is possible to live non- violently.*

- **HIV/AIDS Pandemic:**

- *We entreat that its gender dimension be intentionally focused in all initiatives.*

- **Structures and systems in the church:** *We recognize that there have been wounds of exclusions. Women want to be genuinely accepted as representatives and leaders of the church as laity and ordained.*
- *There is a need to go beyond the stage of having women's presence or participation to genuinely according our rightful place in designing policies, in the administration and in leadership.*
 - *While acknowledging that dialoguing **must** continue within the Lutheran tradition, ecumenically and among faith communities, we look for focussing on commonalties and ways we could work together on issues as **concrete practical ecumenism** that is experienced at local level.*
 - *We particularly emphasize that the member churches **should live up to their commitments of affirming and promoting** the leadership of women. Our policies and our negotiations should be signs and our practices be expressions of such commitments.*
 - *The churches need to address the issue of sexuality and power more systematically and use gender as a tool for analysis to identify the disparities. Our words and the way we live out should be expressions of inclusive communion.*
- **Ordination of Women:** *It is painful that one-third of the LWF communion churches do not ordain women.*
 - *While we acknowledge that there is need for patience we also see the need for perseverance and an openness to share and learn from experiences of women in ordained ministry, the difficulties some churches genuinely feel and to strategically move towards becoming a visible expression of being an inclusive communion by ordaining women in all member churches.*
- **Economic Globalization:** *Women are facing poverty in a very personal way with rampant promotion of injustices, but have little knowledge of these in spite of experiencing its worst consequences. **Feminization of poverty, feminization of jobs, and feminization of migration** lead to women being in unorganized sectors that increase exploitation, trafficking and sex industry.*
 - ***Impoverishment**, its causes and consequences on people need to be analyzed by churches as a crucial justice issue that should lead to mobilizing solidarity movements.*
 - ***Redefining** both individual and corporate sin in our context is essential.*
 - *The churches need to promote an ethic for **sustainable life styles** that affirms fullness of life for all of creation and facilitate women to be active participants in countering economic globalization.*
- **Culture:** *We identify 'Role stereotyping' as one of our wounds and desire to seek new ways to empower and use our cultures as a way to bond and weave us together as women. Harmful traditional practices and myths needs to be openly condemned by the churches. New forms of masculine models needs to be uplifted*
- **Religious Conflict:** *Religious conservatism is threatening to set back the advances women have made.*

- *Religious motivated conflicts **need interfaith and intra-faith dialogue** that should be reflected at ground level and matched with actions on issues that unite us. We need to look for **commonalities** rather than at our differences*
- **Environmental Destruction.** *We particularly point this as an issue that churches need to explore and respond to.*

How Can Healing take place?

We affirm that as church we are one and we feel the same pain. "If one member suffers, all suffer together." (I Cor: 12:26). Therefore we urge the LWF and its member churches to facilitate the healing process among women by:

- sustaining the programs of and on women,
- continuing to provide education on economic literacy, health, language and leadership,
- providing cross cultural education, and
- to continue promoting awareness on human rights and the human rights mechanisms.

Above all, we request the churches to identify different ways of healing; through liturgies, liturgical language, through lectionaries and by concentrating in designing the type of theological education that provides knowledge, skills and scope to be involved in all aspects of living.

How can the LWF Communion be healthy?

We entreat all member churches to name the wounds as openly as we did, so that each church in its context can begin the healing process. We re-emphasize the following and call on the Churches to:

- **Take seriously the voices of women** and not to simply acknowledge their presence. Include women representatives and officials in church committee meetings to avail their insights and resources.
- Actively listen and respond when women name their concerns (wounds).
- Consult with women who are active in women's ministry when selecting women to represent the church at LWF and other events.
- Facilitate the networking of women by providing the necessary infrastructure.
- Name the **disintegration of the family as a wound** and to open up for discussions the questions of sexuality, power, and to acknowledge the changing face of the family.
- Include HIV/AIDS awareness especially its gender dimension in all Christian education programs, for children and youth.
- Proactively be involved in gender training for all congregations and specifically for church leadership and
- Reclaim the biblical concept of 'Shalom'

Our daily confession creates hope and restores relationships and living conditions. We urge all to take this task as a sign that God lives in us and we in God and to work towards healing and wholeness for the whole of God's creation.



RESOURCES

RESOURCES

FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD: A THEOLOGICAL IMPETUS

Rev. Dr Isabelle Graesslé

Moderator, Protestant Church of Geneva, Switzerland

It is a long time ago. In a magnificent garden. A woman, beautiful of course. She is looking around her; she looks to the man beside her and finds him... interesting, although a little too much "belly oriented". They are surrounded by luxuriant nature, especially two huge trees. The woman turns her head and sees the first one, the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Attracted by its promises, she does not really see the other one, the Tree of Life. Years and decades later, she used to think that, the destiny of the world could have been changed if, instead of the first tree, she had tasted the fruit of the other one...

Sometime after... after the episode of the snake, of the anger of God, of the exit from the garden... she dreams, helped by the angel of the future which opens for her the curtains which veil the horizon. After all, she is Awah, the Living, mother of the living people on earth... she has a right to know...

The curtains are open : and what she looks at is even more spectacular and gorgeous than what she was used to in the garden : a large river, the river of water of life that sparkles like crystal. It flows down the middle of the city street. And, there she is surprised to see the Tree of Life, the one she was quite regretting from her stay in the beautiful garden, here on the side of the river ! At that very moment, the angel of the future gets closer and, whispers in her ear, «it bears fruit twelve times a year, once every month... and its leaves are for the healing of the nations».

And then, Awah understands... what she did in the garden was right... she had to help herself and Adam to get out of the beautiful prison in order to care for the earth, the adamah. She had to literally "eat" the fruit of good and evil, in order to become an adult, in order to develop a world of knowledge. But now, at the evening of her life, she understands that the other tree, the tree of life, was not for her... it was for the coming generations, the generations of whom she was the mother. These generations would receive the tree of life, at the end of the world. At least its leaves. And Awah closes her eyes. Now she can rest in peace and rejoice about her visions. Looking at her, beautiful as on the first day of creation, the angel of the future smiles smoothly and decides it's time to close the curtains.

However, what Awah did not know is that even before the end of the world, sometimes, the life of human beings would be touched by a leaf of the tree of life, for the healing of this man or woman, for the meaning of their life.

Centuries and centuries after the visions of Awah, Mother of the Living, a man called Ieshouah, on his road to Jerusalem, passes at the fringe of a heretic and strange territory, Samaria (Luke 17,11-19). On his way, the man is met by ten lepers. They stand at a distance, simply because the law forbids them to get closer. Only the word exchanged will bring them together. And they shout : "Jesus, Master, have pity on us !".

Surprisingly, the man asks them to go and have the priests examine them. Actually it is not so surprising : according to the Jewish law, you have to let the priests examine you when you are healed, especially from leprosy. And the ten lepers find enough confidence to follow the advice of this master, this young rabbi, they met on their road.

And it works... on the way, they are made clean. But still, between them and their healer, the distance does stay : they have had what they wanted, they admire their purified body and

disappear from the story. Just one of them, when he sees that he was healed, comes back, praising God in a loud voice. Apparently, for him, healing means much more than the purification of his body. For the nine others, the prophet Ieshouah was a way to encounter a new life, a life reintegrated inside the social and religious community. It's already quite a result, isn't it ? For the tenth, it is his healing which constitutes the way to pass to another life, a life where the distance between humanity and divinity changes, diminishes little by little. For this tenth man, the gift of healing is almost overclouded by the healer. Ieshouah had asked him to let the priest examine him... actually, the man examined himself healed. And that is why he comes back : not because he is polite, but because he has examined himself.

Then, the distances take another dimension, they abolish themselves in this movement of the coming back of the Samaritan, which suddenly finds himself very close to the rabbi on the road. Here he is, shouting again. That time not asking for pity, just shouting his gratitude. At that moment, the physical healing, quite spectacular, has become an inside itinerary. An itinerary where the distances are abolished and a human being is resurrected to himself : "Get up and go; your faith has made you well". One could also understand... "Get up, resurrect, to go on your new road."

It is not a moral story, this story of nine lepers remaining on a very physical level, and only the tenth capable of coming back to himself, the only one capable of reappropriating his own history.

All the lepers were sick and all have been healed. The only detail that the story tells, is that for one of them, something particular is happening : he sees himself healed and this is what overturns his life. To attest this overturn, Ieshouah sends him back, on the road, with this affirmation : "Your faith has made you well". Does it mean that the first nine are not yet made well? We hear nothing about it in the story. Maybe the miracle does not correspond to the healing... but to what is happening after the healing. To what is made of the healing...

Beyond healing, there have been words exchanged, distances have been abolished, a confidence has been re-established, a dismissal has been made in order to continue on the road. Beyond healing, it has simply been resurrection. This is what salvation means. And it is already quite much !

For years, I did not like the word "salvation". I found it old, unsuited to the postmodern expectations about spirituality and faith. Actually I think I disliked what theology had done to the concept of "salvation", a kind of supreme goal to pursue, by virtue of moral principles or, in a more Protestant version, by virtue of tons of faith. But the story of the Samaritan leper just tells about fullness of life.

When the rabbi on the road dismisses the healed leper for the second time, when he sends him on the roads of the world with the assurance of a salvation given in plenty, it is to remind him of the intensity, which from now on, belongs to him. Salvation, as the Kingdom, begins already down here, not in an imaginary future.

As a confirmation, just after this story, the Pharisees ask Ieshouah when the Kingdom of God would come. The rabbi answers : "The Kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say : "Look, here it is !" or "There it is !" because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17,20-21).

It is exactly because the Kingdom is really here and now, in the middle of us, inside us also, that our lives cannot be reduced to what it is physically : that's the meaning of the many

leaves of the tree of life which are covering our path... even if we do not see them. Our origin calls us to more greatness. More intensity also. Our road is marked by little and huge resurrections. Because the word which resurrects continues to send people on the roads of life.

Besides miracles which are wonderous, there are miracles of other depths. Miracles which open to an exchange of significant words, miracles which give meaning to life, which untie what preys upon our lives. We know perfectly that our modern leprosies bear often the names of our anxieties. The healing of our existence has something to do with the trace of God's desire in us. A desire of seeing us resurrected to life, here and now.

There is another story about healing, even healing from death, that is told about Ieshouah the prophet. The scene is located in a small village called Bethany. There lives a man, Lazarus, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. At the beginning of the story, Lazarus is quite ill and he dies. It is only after three days that the prophet will come and visit this family, although Lazarus was his friend (John 11,1-44).

What is actually interesting to note is that, something important will happen. Yes, I know that you know what will happen. But something else also will happen : the changing in the understanding of the conception one can have about life : for all the actors and actresses of the story (the disciples, the opponents, the two sisters), life is flowing according to a binary conception : to come and go, to arrive too late or to leave too early, to stop or to go, to be sick or to be healed, to be in the light or the darkness, to live or to die.

However, for the prophet Ieshouah, there is another term, the third one which was missing in the binary conception : the term of event, which comes unexpected, which allows you to leave when nobody expects it, to stop at the right moment, to wake up somebody who was sleeping.

But, before arriving to that moment when Lazarus is woken up from death, Ieshouah still needs to cross the road of the two sisters. These two behave so oddly: when Lazarus was sick, but their living friend was not there and the two sisters wanted him with them. But as soon as Lazarus is dead, Ieshouah comes and the two sisters do their best in order to avoid his coming to the tomb...

Martha, I just love her : an energetic woman, full of initiatives. She does so much (we know her particularly in her kitchen). Here, she appears as knowing all the powers of the rabbi: only by his presence, death would have stepped down.

Mary, she is the woman of desire, of emotion. She is called for by Ieshouah: "the Teacher is there and is asking for you" and only then, she moves. But as soon as she sees her friend, she falls down and this movement touches him deeply.

On one hand, before going to heal his friend from death, Ieshouah tries to reconcile the two sisters, actually he tries to reconcile knowledge and desire.

Then, finally, he arrives at the tomb and tells only two sentences: to put the stone away and for Lazarus to come out. In between, just a few words to the Father. What happened ? On the one hand, death is not avoidable, despite what the two sisters are thinking. Between life and death there is an impassable gate. And even there, there is a door which opens and closes: a passage is given.

Resurrection therefore is not continuation of a former life or the negation of death. One cannot avoid death. One cannot even extend life. Death is not the opposite of life: it is a special state where the voice of the one who has been sent can wake us up.

The great Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza once said to his friends that he would have happily thrown away all his philosophical system and embraced the Christian faith, but only if he would have been convinced not of the resurrection of Jesus, but of the one of Lazarus. Beside his brilliant intelligence, I think that Spinoza was on another level of understanding than the one the story of Lazarus asks for. The question is not to be convinced of the resurrection of another. The question is to be called to a Kingdom emerging in our present time. As if Mary and Lazarus were the two faces of the same person. And this call is heard even in the midst of our present time: "The Teacher is there and is asking for you... come out !". And sometimes, in your life, you don't even hear these words, you just feel something strange, like a little caress on your shoulder... it is the light caress of one of the leaves of the Tree of Life, the Tree of Life for the Healing of the Nations."

**WOMEN CONTEXTUAL STRATEGIES FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD:
THE POWER OF GLOBAL SOCIAL SOLIDARITY**

Dr Musimbi Kanyoro

General Secretary, World YWCA, Geneva, Switzerland

Allow me to begin with three statements, slightly heretical perhaps, but very real to me.

Firstly, these days, I have trouble in my conversation with God. Time and again, I find myself echoing the prayer of Jesus on the cross "My God, My God, why have you forsaken us?" My pain comes from our world context and actions, which continually diminish human dignity and paint life as sheer vanity. War, disease, poverty, hunger and the list has no end. Why should death have so much say in our daily life? Why should some people just decide any time who should live and who should die? I do get traumatized, and more often than not, the world has become a theater of tragedy. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has reached a level of such significance that it has become an obsession. It is an incomparable human catastrophe! The figures of its effect are hallucinatory. They are simply more than my mind can absorb. The thought of more than a hundred million infections, by the year 2010, is difficult to fathom. At the HIV/AIDS World Conference in Barcelona June 2002, we were told that more than 70 million people of whom 90% are in Africa would die from AIDS related illness by the year 2020. These figures to me are an invitation to apathy. I am not denying their validity. Rather I am saying that, they are numbing, de-empowering and they are traumatizing. Why bother doing anything?

But not doing something and waiting for death is not on my agenda. That leads me therefore to my second statement. I refuse to subscribe to a victim mentality either as a woman, a black, a person from a poor economy or any other social ghetto that we use to marginalize groups of people. We are not victims of circumstances or victims of people or of the times in which we live. When at airports I am picked out for more search because my race is the suspect group for drug trafficking, I say a little prayer for the self-righteousness of those who so name us. I speak against this kind of subtle racism that is rampant in our world and organize with others to denounce racism as a structural sin. We are not victims; rather, we are agents of change. I even dare say, we are God's partners and we are entrusted to work with God to bring healing to our hurting world. It is my contention that God does not just use us as instruments for healing, but God invites our participation as those created in God's own divine image. Together with God, we can make a world of difference. When I speak at public gathering about God's immeasurable love for women or for the continent of Africa, I often sound naïve or even heretic to some. However, I mean it and believe it in my heart that God has blessed us with an understanding of what it means to be loved, to obtain mercy, to suffer, to be ashamed and just be who you are. Faith, Hope, and Love are worlds, which provide for me the framework from which to operate and to move far away from self pity, anger and remorse. I believe that we need to have inner peace about who we are which allows us to accept and value others and ourselves.

My third statement will sound like a contradiction to some and that is the reason why I thought it could be heard as being heretical. I believe that our world today, despite its seeming madness, grants to us more opportunities to know God than we care to accept. We have enough troubles to send us seeking for answers and when we fail, we find ourselves remembering that there used to be God. Does it ever surprise you that when there are catastrophes, people start organizing spiritual and ecumenical prayers and worship? Is this familiar to you now? Do you not read everywhere about interfaith gatherings, churches

working together to counter the spread of AIDS, organize responses to the threat of war in Iraq, find ways to rebuild burnt mosques, churches and synagogues or to plant new olive trees for Palestinians? Are these not opportunities to seek healing for the World?

How shall we as women, and women of the Lutheran Churches, seize the kairos of our times and let God heal our hurts from the past, from the present and in the future? As healed persons, we shall be empowered to be healers of others. How should we talk about God within us today? I want to suggest that, our own healing comes from our affirming our journey as global women who are committed to supporting and upholding one another. We have come a long way together in sharing, nurturing and finding solutions to our social, theological and spiritual concerns. Let me recall parts of this journey for our celebration here and now.

Our Story – Transforming Powerless – Importunate Women

Ours is a story of transformation – transforming powerlessness into the power to change. We the Lutheran women are, part of a global movement of women, called to reach out to those in society, who would otherwise remain mere statistics of misfortune. Our programs, our activities have and must continue to empower women, girls and children and give them an opportunity to realize their potential and to become their own advocates for their dreams and visions. Literacy, education, economic security, health and self-esteem are some of the tools of empowerment, which we must use at all times and in all places.

To empower woman means to share with each other the ability to have the skills for understanding and participating in the decisions that affects our lives and the lives of those around you. Therefore, this pre assembly has a task to help every woman who will be a delegate to understand every aspect of the agenda that will take place in Canada. In so doing, we must remember that the agenda of our Lutheran Communion comes from the reality of our churches. If we want to effect change, we need to understand local process and to be change agents in our local churches. That is much harder than it is at the LWF level. For every LWF led agenda, let us ask ourselves:

1. How does it come about? Think Local, - what is happening in our locations and contexts that is calling for global solidarity? This means that local actions inform the global agenda. It is the things that we experience in our personal lives, in our community and in our countries, which motivate us to act. First we experience them at personal level, then we share our experiences with others and when we find that commonality, we get encouraged to act together. Act Global – through the LWF Assembly. Experience the great strength that women bring to the global solidarity, which women have formed through participation at Church and ecumenical assemblies, the UN conferences and NGO rallies.
2. Listening to the various inputs from countries and our own Churches, one can see an emerging Global agenda, one that is not different from the Nairobi Forward Looking strategies or the Beijing Platform for Action. So we need to put our issues within the framework of other global women's issues. There are no real Lutheran issues. Even ordination of women is not a Lutheran issue. The Lutheran Church helps us to live out and express issues of all God people and God's total creation. When we ask for a place to sit at Lutheran tables of decision-making we are only asking for space to be witnesses of God's Grace.

3. Women have chosen a human rights framework for global advocacy. The language of Human Rights cuts to the core of women's and girl's inequality. Denial of human rights means denial of fundamental components of being human. It is the dehumanization of women that fosters and supports discrimination and violence against women and girls. From rape in wars across cultures to economic exploitation of women. In the Church context, however, we must also use the language of theology and worship. Grace, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation are words, which bring us closer to healing than the words we use to claim rights. I believe that the church language is an added value to Christian women's advocacy work. Learning to use the right language will help us to be heard by those we seek to change. It is also a celebration of our place in the story of God salvation.

Celebrating Our Powerful Story

We have a lot to celebrate. Women have acted to empower one another for generations. Oral and written testimonies of women's lives give evidence to powerful actions and achievements gained through global, social advocacy. It is gatherings such as this one, that have given women space to nurture their collective consciousness and solidarity actions. As women talked to one another, we began to discover that our individual experiences of discrimination, triviality, abuse and distortion were not unique. Finding a common ground where we did not expect to, we discovered women's stories as a crucial entry point to women's solidarity. Our social analysis has provided both the therapy we need to heal from our past and also has given us the possibility to use our collective power to change our lives and to invest in the future generation of women. Global Solidarity, bonding, connecting and networking are words that we have used much, as they describe the life of women and women's global movements.

In the process of women coming from different parts of the World, listening to one another's stories as, we have discovered common themes, but we have also confronted our differences sharply and often uncomfortably. Our experiences are similar but they are not homogeneous. Our contexts define our differences and sharply marks both and open our eyes to new ventures or imprison us in our own cultures, theologies economies and politics. Today the differences, which seem most significant, are those which mark us within the borders of economics, religion, race, geography, generation, sexuality, health and disabilities. Our credibility is tested as to whether we can put in place systems and practices which stand for human dignity, no matter who the person is and their context, origin or looks. We are part of our churches and our societies, but we can refuse to victimize others and to let ourselves be made into victims. Our success is measured by how we acknowledge and manage differences and how we embrace diversity and use it for the good of all.

As you know, I now work for a women's organization, the YWCA. In YWCA, difference is an asset and we strive to manage and invest our differences wisely to avoid being trapped into helplessness, powerlessness and limiting paradigms. Let me draw some examples from the YWCA to illustrate my points.

Women globally do indeed have some common and distinctive stories as women even though we are different and come from different contexts. Three very important achievements stand out for mention as common global issues in women's agenda regardless of their geography.

1. Translating our individual domestic and private troubles into public policy

Making the personal, political and the private, public has enabled women all over the World to break the silence over all kinds of expressions of violence against women. Women today publicly name beatings and psychological torture, sexual abuse, trafficking, ritual murders, rape, harassment and all forms of the so-called "domestic violence" as grave violations of human rights. In the YWCA as well as in other women's organizations, building support systems to help those affected as well as mobilizing collective actions to combat violence against women has become a clear common agenda. Women seek to change policy so that all forms of violence are illegal no matter where they are committed and by whom and to whom. When violence against women is referred to as "domestic", it minimizes the seriousness of this crime and instead attempts to justify the perpetrator's action. Making the personal political is critical because we invoke moral judgements on our societies. Justice, fairness, dignity, equity and equality are the terms we have used and we have demanded accountability based on these terms. YWCA like Church women's organization, makes a difference because our programs not only provide support services to needy cases, but more important, our programs seek to help the individual woman, girl or child become a leader in addressing her own needs. This is empowerment. Empowered persons voluntarily become advocate for others in similar situations. When we talk of developing leaders, we begin at the personal level. Our individual leaders form the core of our volunteers who serve on governing boards, go to the field to teach, help and give their resources to help others. Developing volunteer leaders is our challenge and our success stories lie in the fact that we run our movement through the power of volunteers.

2. A long History of Trust: A Social Capital Investment

One woman comes to a YWCA for a literacy class. The other one goes to YWCA for breast cancer information. Yet another, for dropping her child at the day care center. All of them and all others who participate or work for YWCA programs as volunteers and staff and service users do so because of the trust they have for YWCA. This trust has been built over time and continues to be nurtured everyday wherever there is a YWCA. Stories are not shared or told except in a context of mutual trust. Without trusting the good will of others, we retreat into bureaucracy. Rigid rules and laws or program guidelines, by themselves do create functioning communities. It is the attitudes and belief of people, which encourage positive behavior and solidarity as elements of community life. YWCA help communities to develop social capital within them by involving the local communities in what we do. I know that I can say the same of Lutheran women's forums.

Trust is essential for developing social well being, which translates into social capital. Trust is based on positive experiences with other people and it grows with use. Trust leads to cooperation. Which bring me to the next point.

3. Growth: Cooperation not Competition

We know that working together is a better investment yet we are surrounded by the ethos of competition, which overrides the ethics of care for one another. The number of women's networks, organizations and movements has increased tremendously since the 70's. As a result of such dynamic growth, the perception of competition for funding has also increased. Yet, I believe that this perception of competition can become a wedge that divides us and keeps us all from securing the resources to implement our shared vision of a world in which justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom, and care for the environment prevail. To realize this common vision, we must work together, develop more dialogue across networks, and really invest in sharing information and good practices. We need to build a store of trust

and good will as part of our social capital for the coming years – enough to carry us through bad times. YWCA promotes joint program with other organizations, joint approach to sharing of resource and expertise and common approach to finding solutions on similar issues. This spirit of cooperation maximizes the positive results and gives our movement security and trust of others.

But we are living in very contradicting times. On the one hand we can look back even only two decades ago and note huge achievements in women's advancement in academics, research, finance, technology, communication and advocacy. On the other hand, the achievement seem minor compared to the contradictions of poverty and affluence; international exploitation and local indifference; AIDS and health care; feminized poverty and Western Industrialized nation's privilege. We experience these contradictions through conflicts of every type, around ownership of rights and voice.

Amidst these times that resemble the 60's, we are challenged to sort out the contradictions in our vision and service to women and girls in the 21st century. Contradictions have to do with conscientization; that is, learning to perceive the inconsistencies between the way we experience our social reality and the way we imagine and respond to the experiences of others. Our strength is rooted in our willingness to embrace these contradictions and to seek to live in community with one another across barriers of sex, race, sexuality, religion and class. This is a continuing struggle: to face the contradictions between what we say and what we are able to do.

Thus, ours is a story of contradictions. It is a story of celebrations and lamentations, similarities and differences and individualism and solidarity and unity and diversity. Telling each other our stories of either privilege or otherwise honestly, we assert our own worth and dignity and courage to change in order to be also channels of change for others.

It is our courage, determination and hope that propel us into the future. It is our energy as women expended spiritually, physically and intellectually that keeps the candles of hope burning into the 21st century. Hope for me is the spirituality of not giving up. This spirituality is everything that I have known growing in Africa. We know misery. We know powerlessness. But Hope is our story. To embrace hope is to be labeled a "troublemaker" – and that is what we have been called in Africa. Troublemakers do not give up – they do not let go until others are shamed into action. Is this not what has happened with the distribution of AIDS drugs in places like South Africa? When voices were first raised, the cause seemed hopeless. And yet, these troublemakers persisted in speaking truth to power. Eventually, the drug companies heard the truth and changed their policies – and by listening, the drug companies have also been redeemed by their action, and brought into the family of justice. At the Assembly, be gentle as doves and be gentle troublemakers, just as the woman in Luke 18.1-8. May God grant you justice and wisdom! Thank you.



VILLAGE THEMES

VILLAGE THEMES

and

VILLAGE GROUP

DISCUSSIONS

GOD'S HEALING GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION
Rev. Dr Eva Vogel-Mfato
Conference of European Churches (CEC), Geneva, Switzerland

My generation was shaped by feminist theology. We were and are searching for our own identity as women, as Christians and as theologians within male structures. One of the important impulses came from the feminist reflection on sin and justification after the discovery that justification, as interpreted by male theologians, would hinder women instead of liberating them. Sin has been traditionally translated as "hubris": false pride, the striving to be like God. Women must not be liberated from a sense of true pride, but from just the opposite: from a socially constructed low self-understanding, from a negative relationship to their psychic and physical integrity, from the stereotypes that keep women quiet in the background and behind men, from not living up to their full potential because of a lack of trust in themselves. This was and often still is, female sin. Accordingly, justification for women should mean to be reminded that we are created in the image of God, that we are God's beloved people. Moltmann-Wendel's interpretation of justification for women was summarized in the words: "I am good, I am whole, I am beautiful." In relationship with God, women must be healed and enabled to rise up to their potential as whole, integrated persons. The justifying message was: take courage and live your life as sister and partner of Christ. Let the women around Jesus be your guide and example.

There is a crippled woman who Jesus raised up in public in the midst of a hostile social and religious environment. There is the woman who had suffered from bleedings for many years – just imagine the immense loss of energy this meant! She was healed just by reaching out to contact Jesus, just a soft touch. And there is the encouraging example of the syro-phonesian (Samaritan) woman, so persistent and convincing in the power of her personality and her arguments. She challenges Jesus, the man, and finally she wins. He affirms her in her fight for her daughter's life. There is even more in the relationship between women and Jesus: they empower each other. They share passion and compassion. Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus open their house to Jesus. Here, Jesus finds a home, a place to rest. And I imagine that it was not always the case that Martha remained in the kitchen while Mary sat with Jesus. Normally, they would all sit together, in the warmth of a fireplace and a good hospitable meal, sharing, listening and talking, supporting and strengthening each other in their commitments. It was a community which was, in itself, healing.

In dialogue with Martin Buber, the Swiss psychotherapist Jürg Willi speaks of the ecology of relationships in love, referring to the most intimate and personal aspect of human development. The I becomes herself in the "thou". One of the great merits of feminist theology is the reformulation of theology from a relational perspective, to heal women's identities and empower women through an affirmative interpretation of justification.

And women have taken up the challenge. They are taking leading roles in the renewal of the churches. They are reciprocally enriching theology and practical church work by linking theology to the concerns, the experience and knowledge of the people at the grass roots. Numerous women have moved up into leading positions in their churches. We are even able to celebrate the election of female bishops.

Nevertheless, the question of a specific female way to fill one's professional role continues to be acute. Our structures remain shaped by male culture, by male aims and male objectives.

There seems to continue a certain inner tension, not only in the communion between men and women in the church, but also among women. I see women who have accepted responsible positions who, in their search for being accepted, seem to fall into the same trap of sin as men. "Hubris" is not so far from women as the last generation thought. And there is more to it. With having to function within a male world and church, many are confronted daily with their own vulnerability. And maybe the attitude of powerful women, which we might look at critically, is just the outside manifestation of this inner tension. How can we be healed from this? How can we live up to our full strength and possibilities?

And there is another issue I want to mention. We are confronted world wide with the cries of the suffering who yearn for healing. There is the urgent challenge to heal economies and communities, to bring about justice and peace and to mend creation. We know that it is God's own compassionate cries which we hear through the voices of our fellow human beings and the pains of creation. On the other hand, there is growing helplessness and frustration. The problems seem overwhelming. The different aspects of the present ecumenical crisis are also an expression of this. We are part of sick structures, we cannot avoid it. We do not live up to our own standards of reconciliation, peace building, and healing of the world. And there are many, even Christians, who have become sick of it and try to numb themselves by being content with the search for happiness in the small, private world. But a society which suppresses suffering and passion will, at the end, become sick itself.

This is sin: to refuse to live in the passion of God. And we can really speak of justification as a healing gift. It is God's truthfulness towards us, God not giving up communion with us. He/she is faithful to us as a friend and intimate partner who understands us in our most inward possibilities. God's affirmation is the basis for challenging us. We can feel secure and sheltered, without having to be afraid to surrender or to be misused by our feelings. God acts like a human partner who comforts us when we are miserable and lack success. God, a friend, who critically addresses our tendencies of avoidance and withdrawal, and challenges us to move forward. Jesus has shown us a God who invites us to walk the path of life together, to overcome limits and difficulties and to challenge each other's possibilities. We do not have to be perfect. But in communion with God in Christ, like the women in the Bible, we are encouraged to do the small things we can do and do them ever more. God rejoices over our bits and pieces, just as he/she is proud of great forward moving ideas and generous deeds.

When we want to encourage one another, ecumenically as well, we tend to look too much at the so-called significant personalities. Faith in justification gives us a realistic perspective of our humanity. It is much more encouraging to look at people "just like us" as being exemplary: normal Christians who are themselves, in the whole of their being, genuine signs of the mercy of God. And, in this often mercy-less world, we need them as signs of healing.

Therefore, the theme of the next CEC Assembly – Jesus Christ Heals and Reconciles: Our Witness in Europe – which takes place in Trondheim shortly before the LWF Assembly, is most meaningful in connecting the theme of our healing to reconciliation and witness.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

HEALING GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION

Not all of us in the group were able to read the study book carefully. The group pointed out two points.

1) The question of what does SIN mean?

We talked about individual sins and about communal sins which can be expressed in structural forms or some traditions that we experience as oppressive towards women. So the question we would like to raise for us is how do women still define sin and how do we address this?

2a) What does justification of faith mean in relationships? What does justice mean in relationships? Each group with common goals has its own unique expression of relationship. We still would like to raise the issue of justice in relationships, those broken relationships which include men and women and the gender issues. How does this gender equality is experienced in our church, our family and society? How far have we reached? Of course regional uniqueness will have a play on this, due to our differences in experiences.

2b) Relationship between generations

We acknowledge that younger women of today have unique experiences other than those who have paved the way for them (the feminists, our mothers or grandmothers in the last decade). How do women, both young and old, or young and younger, can work together, learn and understand from each others experiences, to reach the common goal of feminist theology? Furthermore we would like to raise this justice in relationship between nations and other divided groups.

HEALING GIFT OF COMMUNION

Rev. Dr. Karen Bloomquist

**Director, Department for Theology and Studies, LWF, Geneva, Switzerland
(and editor of the Assembly Study Book)**

Introducing the intent of the Assembly Study Book

Healing occurs not primarily through lots of words, but through our actions and how we relate together with one another at pre-assembly gatherings and at the Assembly itself.

I would like to point out to this gathering that there were some inherently feminist assumptions embedded in the process of developing the Study Book and in what we envision taking place at the Assembly itself. These assumptions emphasize participation, collaboration, and deliberation together. They are in contrast to more hierarchical ways of operating that propose the answers and what should be done, in ways that are hierarchically imposed on others. We have tried to design a process and go about writing the material in the Study Book, so that this might evoke the concerns and the issues that people bring from different parts of the world. The Village Group chapters were developed in ways to provide some theological bases for how we, as a Lutheran communion, can approach these topics and from our different kinds of perspectives, raise up and discuss together our particular concerns. We are very much counting on the creativity and the insights of those who will be leading and participating in the Villages Groups to identify the particular issues that they feel need to be addressed.

The overall design of the ten Village Group chapters is a complex fabric. Those of you who have done weaving are well aware that the threads weave in and out across the fabric, which is similar to how these Village Groups have been designed. This means that an issue is likely to emerge in more than one group. There is not, for example, one that is focused primarily on gender. Gender and other concerns of women are far too important to be only limited to one or two Village Groups. Instead, they permeate the whole. In looking at these ten different topics, you begin to see how the concerns of women and the concerns of gender are ones that need to be raised up in each and every one of them. Each of these issues look different through the lenses of gender. We are especially counting on this and other gatherings of women to help prepare others so that concerns specific to women do not get lost, but are brought up in each of the Village Groups. Our concerns as women need to transform the whole; we are not just a special interest group off to the side, but our concerns and perspectives need to undergird and transform the whole of how we as the LWF in the next period of time will be carrying out our work.

In addition to the time spent in Village Groups discussing the Bible studies for each day, several hours will be spent working together on the topic assigned to each Village Group, and bringing specific recommendations which will become a part of the overall Message of the Assembly. In this sense, Village Groups are the strategic places where the work of the Assembly will get done, and move from there to the plenary sessions for action.

God's Healing Gift of Communion

I turn now to one of these Village Group topics, on what it means to be a communion. As we work together in *each* of the Village Groups we will in a sense be testing out and experiencing what it means to be a communion of churches in the midst of all our diversity.

"Communion," as we have been developing it in the recent years in LWF, is inherently a non-hierarchical way of talking about the church. It involves giving and receiving, shared responsibility, hearing and responding, instead of relationships of domination and subordination. These are ideas that come up a lot when we as women talk together about new ways of being the church. I am thinking here of some feminist writings in the area of ecclesiology – the church in the round, with coequal relationships of mutuality, rather than hierarchical structures or ways of being church. Therefore part of what we want to experience in all of the Village Groups, but particularly in the one on "God's healing gift of communion" is this: what does it mean for us to struggle together with our very real differences as part of one communion? This is made apparent in the description of this Village Group. Here we anticipate and hope that some very delicate and difficult issues that often divide us in the communion might be talked through.

Many of these issues have to do with gender, with women, and with sexuality. Having recently been in South Africa and some months ago with the Concerned Circle of African Women Theologians, I am well aware that in that region, for example, talking about issues of sexuality and gender, especially as they relate to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, is very crucial but often quite difficult to talk about. Each of us could name what those issues are that are difficult to talk about in our region. Many of them have to do with how power and authority is exercised. At the previous Assembly, the ordination of women, particularly with regard to one church that had pulled back from that commitment, became a heated topic of discussion. So one of the central challenges of this Village Group is how these real differences within the communion can be talked about in constructive and healing kinds of ways.

How do we deal with the very real differences that are based on our different histories and cultures, or on political changes that have occurred in our countries (such as in eastern Europe and in South Africa)? How do we deal with the generational differences in our churches and within our communion? How do we deal with the fact that, in many places, who is a part of our Lutheran churches may be determined more by what ethnic group they are a part of than by theological beliefs? Where is forgiveness, healing and reconciliation especially needed in this communion? Given the importance of communication, how can we more genuinely communicate with one another, in ways so that we might realize some degree of healing within the communion? We are anticipating that in this particular Village Group a variety of these kinds of difficult issues can be opened up and talked about.

Furthermore, communion, as God's gift, is a means for healing in the world. I invite you to consider how this was communicated in the letter coming from the recent consultation on "Prophetic Diakonia: For the Healing of the World." It raises some important dimensions of what it means to engage in the prophetic calling of diakonia, namely, working for changes in structures and policies for the sake of greater justice. There are a variety of issues in the world on which we need to stand in solidarity with one another as a communion of churches, not only reaching help to assist one another through more traditional forms of diakonia, but also to engage more vigorously in advocacy on a variety of public policy issues of justice in our world today.

To conclude my remarks, I want to emphasize how important it is that we as women have some effect on the deliberations at the Assembly, and especially in assuring that there can be some honest naming of the real issues at stake. A lot of time those issues can be covered over, silenced by the exercise of hierarchical power. How can there be an honest naming of those

issues, a genuine hearing of one another and searching for some common ground, so that out of this, we might arrive at some clear commitments of what we will say and do together?

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

GOD'S HEALING GIFT OF COMMUNION

The group pointed out 10 points:

1) Joy and sadness

Joy because we speak about communion and we express our joy as women who have done so much of contribution in the communion. On the other side we feel sadness because the most important matters are decided in the chambers and decided by men. The contribution from women is somehow violated, which aggravates situation and making women to resign.

2) The matter of channeling

How is the channeling done from the Pre-Assembly meetings to the Assembly? We were assured that the village groups report and the crucial points that are raised here are conveyed to the Assembly as they are very important points raised during the Pre-Assembly Gathering.

3) Active voices

We need to send active voices to the Assembly. We want to be sure not to send people who just enjoy time and then do nothing; we want to send people who are interested in matters.

4) Celebration of Eucharist

As we talk about communion, we have to think about the most important and supreme expression of communion: the Eucharist. We need to encourage it and to emphasize that it is supremely Lutheran to celebrate it very often, because Eucharist is the supreme source for the communion.

5) Definition of Communion

We need to define communion from a Christian point of view. It is not just a human togetherness, or just a human society or a human club where we get together because we have so many things in common; it is much more: it is a communion of people who may even have different views. The first step to know is that Jesus Christ is putting us together and making us one. Then, in the process we can become one, we can change into one other and become the other. Jesus is joining us and making us a communion. Maybe we do not even know each other and He is changing us into one another. This is the power of God we experience in a communion.

6) Basic Lutheran teaching of communion

The understanding of basic Lutheran teaching of communion is that we are a communion of different people, different backgrounds, but still we are made one in Jesus-Christ.

7) Question of worthiness at the Eucharist

In many churches many people do not go to communion and to Eucharist because they do not feel worthy. We need to stress the Lutheran understanding here that it is not who is worthy but Jesus is the worthy one and He has made us worthy. It is not our prayers or our fasting that makes us able to go to the Eucharist, but Christ who makes us come to the Eucharist and makes us clean, and the Eucharist itself.

8) Sharing one cup, literally

HIV/AIDS affected persons sometimes refrain from communion because they do not want to make other people feeling endangered. They do not go and do not commune, not to share one cup. We need to make the liturgy in such a way that the people would feel invited and accepted. It could be using small chalices or even better to use one cup and to dip bread into it so that the powerful symbol of one cup will remain this way.

9) Further issues

We still have to think about further issues to be discussed. Prophetically speaking, one sister imagines that it will be a transforming communion by the gender in dealing with issues of power and sexuality. A transforming communion will be dealing with intercultural experiences that form so much of our background.

10) The importance of community of LWF

We are thankful for the importance of community of LWF, i.e: the document "Churches Say NO To Violence Against Women". We know the importance of encouraging each other in the communion to publish this document, to use it and practice; there we see concretely the sign of communion

HEALING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ONE CHURCH
Rev. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth
World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) Geneva, Switzerland

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.. and all were made to drink of one Spirit" 1 Corinthians 12:13.

The church is the body of Christ. The nature of the church reflects diversity in its various theological traditions, and its cultural, ethnic and historical contexts. It is nourished and enriched as all members contribute their gifts and talents to its ministry and mission. The church is called to be a witness to the world and to further the Kingdom of God in the world.

The church is part of humanity participating in the communion of God, in faith, hope and the glorification of God's name. The church is made up of persons: women and men who are part of this world and are affected by history, culture and other societal conditions. The church is not static but is influenced by positive and negative elements of our world. The growth and development of church is influenced by the power of the holy spirit but also by sin.

The oneness of the church is its very nature given by Jesus Christ. This oneness stands in contrast to the actual divisions that plague the church. As women how do we strive to heal divisions and foster a greater sense of unity?

LWF/WARC Joint Commission

According to the recently published report of the Lutheran-Reformed joint working group, "Lutherans and the Reformed have come a long way together, and the time has come for our highest governing bodies to make a joint declaration on the importance that they attach to the further development of Lutheran-Reformed relationships." Since 1990 our church families have been engaged in a Joint Commission throughout the world to "declare communion with one another" and "to make our unity more real and visible for our members as well as for the world". Despite the different origins in the German, Swiss, and "First" and Radical Reformations, the churches in our two families are, at a more fundamental level, all "churches of the Reformation". The passion to renew the church in the light of the gospel which brought into being the Lutheran and Reformed churches four and a half centuries ago remains alive today within and among us. Both of our traditions are deeply engaged in the ecumenical movement, seeking to renew our faithfulness of Christian witness and service, and to make the unity of Christ's church visible.

During the past decade many significant developments have taken place in different parts of the world. Lutherans and Reformed have engaged in many bilateral dialogues: international, regional and national. In several cases our churches have declared communion. The following are some examples of regional and national efforts towards church unity:

- In 1997, the Formula of Agreement established full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ. A joint co-ordinating committee implements the agreement in areas such as the exchange of pastors, training of global missionaries and planning theological consultations. Other areas of co-operation between the program boards of the churches are emerging.

- In Europe, the Leuenberg Fellowship has been consolidating, strengthening and expanding the communion among Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches.
- Lutheran and Reformed churches co-operate closely within the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches and, together with the Anglicans, form one "family" of churches in the Middle East Council of Churches.
- In some places Reformed and Lutheran churches have come together in union churches. The oldest examples are churches in Germany.
- The 61 Lutheran and Reformed churches belonging to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia continue to work with their Evangelical, Methodist and Pentecostal partners towards the long-stated goal of a United Church in Indonesia (*Gereja Kristen yang Esa di Indonesia*).
- In 1999 the Uniting Church in Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia instituted the Uniting-Lutheran Declaration of Mutual Recognition.

In the light of the theme for the Lutheran Assembly, "For the Healing of the World", we need to move forward in these developments and remove obstacles so that we can experience healing which is an important dimension of salvation and to participate in the healing of the world. In a recent LWF consultation on Implications of "For the Healing of the World", Guillermo Hansen from Argentina pointed out that "justification brings us back to creation in a new way". Furthermore, "in considering the oneness of the church, we need to give attention to local dialogues and experiences in the regions, with different models of unity, including unity that grows out of diaconia."

The challenge now is for this communion to become visible as we deepen our relationship and encourage closer co-operation in praxis through ministry and mission. At the international ecumenical level the WARC and LWF Geneva secretariats have been engaged in work for justice and peace, human rights, ecological integrity and sustainable conditions of life for all. The LWF declaration (1977) and WARC's *status confessionis* (1982) in relation to apartheid is one example of our member churches to make a common commitment. The WARC, LWF, WCC and CEC have held joint consultations on economic injustice and ecological destruction.

On the initiative of the WCC Women's desk and Formation for Ministry and Mission, we have also held joint seminars and consultations. The WARC initiated Manual for Gender Awareness and Leadership Development has also received ecumenical co-operation from the sister organizations. Earlier this year, we shared in CEC's European Women's Consultation. Today we are happy to be here, sharing in your Pre-Assembly event.

As women, we need to reflect on our work together. Have we placed importance in strengthening our prophetic voice as we struggle for gender justice and an inclusive community of faith? Are we liberated enough to model new ways of being church with a vision of the transformed church no longer constrained by the misuse and abuse of power? Or are we still caught up in the web of the old model which sets us apart? Do we feel the need to be self-protective in a way that undermines the unity of our community? What role have we played in promoting a solidarity of sisterhood?

Our societies are crying out for healing. More than ever we understand that we are called to work together to heal divisions not only within the church but also in a broken world – where family is threatened, where the majority of people live in poverty, where HIV/AIDS threatens life in many nations, where the world is groaning in anxiety and fear of the threat of war and where the powerful so blatantly trample upon the weak.

We are called upon to broaden our ecumenism to work with peoples of all religions to bring about this healing. We proclaim in word and deed that our hope is nurtured by the biblical vision of the human community God intends for us, one which empowers us to embrace a fuller life.

When women unite through spiritual groups, circles of power and strength, they are learning to weave. The resulting fabric is vibrant and colorful like our faces, our hands, and our souls. Each of us, in our journey of life, contributes a strand which alone may seem and even feel frail but when placed within the larger, intricate, shared pattern, produces a powerful web, capable of withstanding the inevitable storms.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

HEALING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ONE CHURCH

There were three main points as the group talked about the means of both cooperation and dialogue. If we spend all of our time in ecumenical discussions just talking about our theological differences and similarities then nothing will change on the ground. Especially in parts of the world where poverty, violence, HIV/AIDS are particularly important issues.

We do not want to spend our time just talking about our differences but to focus on our commonalities so that we can address these issues and work together particularly as women who often run pre-school and other social services around the world. There is one contribution that we definitively do make: it is in focusing on our commonalities, to work together in cooperation though we do not want to neglect the importance of dialogue as well.

It is also important for us to discuss our theological differences particularly in areas of women leadership within the church, even though some of our own churches do not yet ordain women or hold up women's leadership. It is important to continue having this dialogue in ecumenical relations to promote the role of women within the church.

Finally our last recommendation is to encourage women's participation in councils, not only at global level but especially at the regional, country and local levels. We particularly encourage that the participation goes through the Women's Desk in our church bodies around the world, both to promote women's leadership and women's voice in ecumenical discussions. This also means to promote the Women's Desk and women offices so that they make a meaningful contribution to the church.



MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN MULTI-FAITH CONTEXTS

Dr. Aruna Gnanadason

World Council of Churches, Geneva/Switzerland

Introduction

At the outset, let me express my appreciation and thanks for this opportunity to greet you and to contribute to your deliberations at this pre-assembly gathering of women. I have read carefully the description of this village group and encourage all of you to read it, as it is a well thought out text and a courageous acknowledgement of some of the mistakes in Christian mission. It also places before us the challenges on the way ahead of us. The writers of this text have made my task much simpler.

Urgency of this discussion

Increasingly, our churches as well as the ecumenical movement have recognized the urgency of this discussion. The bombings of the twin towers in New York on September 11, 2001 and the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan have brought the levels of religiously motivated terror to a new level. And then, the religiously/ethnically fuelled violence in many parts of the world as also the suicide bombings in Palestine, often by young people who are willing to give their lives for a religiously sanctioned cause – all this has forced this issue on the world with a new immediacy.

Women and children – the victims of religious violence

Women are often caught in the crossfire in the midst of tensions between religious groups – it is women who are raped or who experience other forms of abuse so as to teach a lesson to the man who is deemed the enemy. Women and children are rarely the initiators of religiously motivated violence – but they become its primary victims. E.g. in Gujarat in India. In news paper reports of religious tensions, one can always see the phrase "and many women were raped", as if this is inevitable in times of conflict. Whenever religious identities are perceived to be under threat, it is women's (and sadly even children's) sexuality that is targeted.

Legal controls on women

Additionally, when the religious identity of a dominant group is under threat, legal controls are invoked supposedly to "protect" the women of a community from others. Laws curbing the personal rights of women are often introduced. An example that immediately comes to mind is that of Amina Lawal. Even as we meet here, her fate hangs in the air, as a Sharia governed northern province of Nigeria, claims that she could be stoned to death for being caught in adultery. The man in question (who was in fact her ex-husband, has denied having sex with her and has therefore been condoned.)

But then, we must be careful not to make it sound like it is only Islam which is oppressive of women, even women in Christian communities sometimes face discrimination, as in the case of India. The ruling party does not have the political will to change the personal laws that govern Christians in the country, because they do not want to offend the sentiments of minorities – and lose their votes. Minority groups do not ask strongly enough for changes, because to men in these communities, the rights of women are not a priority.

A new "religious" language

Religious tensions are not a new phenomenon in the history of the world but there is a new language of hatred and violence emerging in many places, fuelled by political interests, that makes it particularly frightening. New instruments of violence are being utilized in conflicts

between religious groups. The kind of "religious" language used by President George Bush in the so-called "war against terror" and in the destruction of Afghanistan, and now in the continuing threat against other "Islamic nations" – all have been couched under what could be termed "Christian language" – the language of Crusades. There is no doubt in the minds of those advising Bush in his war, that this is a "just war". This was the language used when Iraq was bombed in 1990 and the present war is no different.

The violent language of present day evangelists and the aggressive tactics used by those who go to "evangelize" the world as part of their mission, continues to be problematic and calls for transformation. A friend recently pointed out the absolutely violent language used by Christian "fundamentalists" in India – a language that brands people of all other religions as lost and sinful. The language of "battles for Christ" and "soldiers for God" reflect a militancy that makes no sense in a world already so filled with violence.

Imposition of a mono-culture – a product of globalization

We live in a world of globalization where pluralism and difference is not valued and the tendency is to promote a mono-culture generated from the centres of economic and political power largely from Europe and North America. In a context of major social change, there is a tendency to cling to the familiar. This gives rise to aggressive individualism and a kind of "fundamentalism" - or of going to the roots of what one believes in and placing this in competition with belief systems of others. This also blocks from our vision the diversity within each religious group. We so quickly brand one group as "terrorists" and therefore to be feared – sometimes to be hurt physically and on occasion even to be killed. At this time, Muslims have been "demonized" globally.

Dealing with the missionary past and moving to the new mission challenges:

The background document so clearly describes how Christian mission was closely linked with the colonizing project of particularly European countries. This is a history that repeats itself today in new ways with new Christian movements spreading into Asia, Africa and Latin America, but also into Eastern European countries. They go in with an aggressive and exclusivist message that they, and only they, carry the truth. They do this, ignoring the existence of great religions (and even denominations other than their own) and other truths in the places they go to. Some of this aggressive behavior is at the heart of much of the violent reaction that comes from the "indigenous" religious groups, as we see in India today.

Unfortunately, our mission history has been built on an over-emphasized concept of the conversion of the world to Christ. "Protestant missiology took shape before the concept of the "mission of God" became a key concept in mission, and within a Theology of Religions that saw no possibility of a life in God through other faith traditions. The intention to be the majority also became the imperial and colonial history of the church, where political power held out the possibility of Christianity, in one way or the other, becoming the religion of the people"²

Dr. Wesley Ariarajah who was formerly Director of the Program of Dialogue with People of Living Faiths in the WCC, speaks of what he considers to be a very "troubling" aspect of Christian life in many of our countries. According to him what is troubling is: "the assumption that the advance of mission has to do with numbers, and that the success and

² Ariarajah Wesley, **Christian Mission: The end or a New Beginning**, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church in USA.

failure of mission, like that of a commercial corporation, can be quantified. It is troubling because of the enormous emphasis it puts on individual conversions and its incapacity to understand the rich biblical concept of vicarious representation."

He proposes, as the background document also does, that we move from "conversion" to "reconciliation" as our mission. In a world so fragmented and bleeding, a world with so much physical and structural violence, our mission has to see us working with people of all faiths for healing and reconciliation. Such a view, challenges the artificial divide between the social and evangelistic tasks of the church. It also poses a challenge to the oft-held assumption that the explicit acceptance of Christ is the basis of salvation.

Our task and challenge as women

As the background document suggests, this is not the time for us to be pitting one religion against the another, putting them in a hierarchy of which religion has the final truth – this is particularly not the moment for Christian triumphalism and arrogance. It is also true that often it is women who support the most aggressive forms of behavior and the most oppressive practices in a religion, because it gives them a sense of identity and a false sense of security.

I believe that as women we must forge greater coalitions, so that as women we can challenge women of all religions to discover within their faiths the liberation potential so as to create harmony and so that we can, together, be agents of reconciliation and peace. We begin with the premise that all religions in their essence, teach peace and justice. In an ecumenical meeting held in March this year, (jointly organized by the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Conference of European Churches) we brought together women from conflict situations. We had with us 50 women representing various religious traditions – Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Brahmakumari religious institute and of course Christianity were represented. We were immersed in the spirituality of the religions we represented as we reflected on the extent of violence in the world, and we looked for resources to overcome violence from our religious traditions. In the interventions, in the readings from various scriptures and in the inter-faith worship that accompanied the discussions, one thing was clear – all religious traditions have at their center, a commitment to peace.

As women we have a vested interest in speaking about this topic and more importantly to act with women of other faiths to develop a new language to face the present missionary challenges before us as Christians in the world. There is hope in the liberating core of the gospel – the fundamental affirmations of the Christian faith. To boldly shift to a new theological paradigm of mission demands the courage to be credible each in our own context – as women from churches in the North and in the South. Today our three-fold evangelizing role is:

- To experience solidarity with people of all faiths by witnessing to a spirituality common to all religions.
- To reveal Christian uniqueness by boldly and courageously proclaiming Jesus as the "pact" that God makes with all those who are excluded from the gifts of abundant life and live daily in a context of violence in our world.

- To act out that message in our actions for healing and reconciliation among all people in our world, across all that divides us as women.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN MULTI-FAITH CONTEXTS

There were two questions raised:

- 1) Where do we need to do reconciliation?
- 2) How do we need to do reconciliation?

We need to really prioritize the work in the local context, within the church, at the parish level. The local level challenges us as churches to live and act in a multi-faith context. It is much easier to agree in general and on an international level than it is in the concrete issues and in a specific situations in our every day life.

How can we work at local level? We need to focus on common mutual issues, not the issues that separate us, but the issues that exist in our every day life: i.e. How human rights for women and children are not implemented (instead of starting by comparing the Bible and the Koran). To share the common experiences, as women have, is doing concrete practical ecumenism and religious dialogue.

We not only need interfaith dialogue between religions but also within the Christian community, working with our self images as Christians (i.e. intra-faith dialogue). These two dialogues are two parallel processes; we cannot wait for the Christian community to agree before we have a dialogue with other religions.

Finally there are some important overall perspectives in the "how" and "where" and that is sensitivity to and for religious contexts and cultures. We need to recognize that there are no quick fix solutions and furthermore definitively not at all general solutions: the solution has to be adapted to the local context.

We also need to be aware that there are no better or worse perspective. It means that we cannot compare the best of Christianity with the worst of Islam. If we do so, we do not have an equal balance and an equal partnership in our dialogue.

REMOVING BARRIERS THAT EXCLUDE

Ms Tania Engel

Cape Town, South Africa

Community is and must be inclusive. The great enemy of community is exclusivity. Communities that exclude others because they are poor, debtors, divorced, sinners of different race or nationality are not communities, they are cliques, actually defensive bastions against community.

Let us think about the church and the society we are ourselves in. When faced with somebody, do we ask the question: "Is it justified to keep this person in, or out of our community?" or are we asking how can we justify taking this person in? The question is whether this church or society that we ourselves are in, are they cliques or are they true communities?

The word in the title is "removing" and it is not passive. In fact, if we replace it by other words, like "to take away", "to move out of the way" we realize that "removing" is a very active process. My talk will therefore focus not on barriers but rather on the word "removing" as an active process. I have to mention a few barriers and since I am from South Africa, I will first mention HIV/AIDS. In Sub-Saharan Africa where 70% of the HIV infections are located, we find that especially women are much affected by HIV/AIDS, between 55% and 60%. Women are especially vulnerable because of violence and abuse. Also there is a lot of stigma attached to HIV/AIDS and people are excluded when they reveal their status to others and therefore they fear disclosure. When faced with the issue of death, they need other people, they need to be surrounded by their family the most, but that is the time they are ostracized. It becomes quite a vicious cycle where the infection rate is increasing.

I also have to mention racism, sexism and the caste system in India which also exclude people. Removing barriers is not an easy task and it is not a simple process. It is not enough to change the legislation of a country, it is not so simple to change laws within marriage (in our country now rape is recognized within marriage whereas a few years ago it was not). Law has changed but it still does not change the physical violence against women.

Jesus led by example and I think that a few of the steps that I will mention are mostly directed on the individual level, as the biggest difference we can make is ourselves being an example to remove barriers. The first step is a commitment to be a true community to coexist with other people, to be willing to struggle together rather than to fight with each other, to be willing to hang in when the going gets tough rather than get going. The second is to appreciate the frankness and encourage each person to be him/herself because there is such a wealth within each person, and to be free to express what they believe, to celebrate and appreciate the different gifts each of us have received from God and to realize that we actually complement one another. The third thing is to examine ourselves as a community, as a communion of churches, as a community in our society because we constantly have to examine who we are, what state we are in order to take the necessary steps for correction. The next step is to provide a safe place and by "safe" we mean a place where everybody feels free to express themselves and not only their opinion but also their emotions. In many families even children are told not to cry because it is not acceptable to feel in a certain way. In fact we should provide a place when we feel safe to cry even. Only in a safe place can emotional healing occur.

Reconciliation is not a simple process as well. In order to remove barriers, we need to reconcile with one another. We also have to empty ourselves of a lot of things; of our own expectations and our own preconceptions, i.e. if I know somebody who irritates me immensely and I meet somebody and they remind me of that person, immediately my opinion of that person is quite warped before that person has even properly spoken to me. This way I have already created a barrier between myself and the person. The next thing is prejudice and each and everyone of us have our own prejudices, so actually empty ourselves of our prejudices requires and takes a lot from us, but it is important, in order to take away the barrier. Then emptying ourselves of our own ideologies and theology, because often we believe that "my way is the only right way". We should actually become humble and realize that there are other right ways as well, my way is not the only right way. Only if we realize that, will barriers be removed. Also we need to empty ourselves of the selfish need we have sometimes to heal, to fix the convert. Sometimes it is not needed to heal somebody else, but ourselves. We also want to control, because we fear failure. If I am not in control all the time, the thing is not going to come out right and we need to empty ourselves from that need.

In conclusion, I would say we need to have "soft eyes" as we often tend to look at each other through very hard eyes. We see all the faults and the mistakes. Let us look at each other with "soft eyes" as well. As we are all shaped by a vast amount of experiences and prejudices and expectations, removing barriers starts within ourselves.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

REMOVING BARRIERS THAT EXCLUDE

By working on the theme of barriers that exclude, we got to the conclusion that:

We challenge the churches to be aware of the way women are constructing.

We challenge the churches to educate without discrimination in all its forms, trying to make it a reality in all working places in the church.

We challenge the churches to motivate the recognition of the diversity of creation to give space to renew our image and concept of God.

We also challenge the churches to motivate its community to overthrow cultural barriers to construct an inclusive culture, recognizing their own identities, but in a dialogue and in apprenticeship of the other.

We also challenge the churches to motivate members to create alternatives in development and in economical development, more specifically regarding poverty and in the search for a life complete for all.

Finally as a Latin American group, we say that we challenge the churches and especially women to recognize the previous women's work for their memory, with the aim that young women will follow and renew the ideals which have been constructed.

The second question is how Jesus Christ gives us strength for transformation? Jesus Christ give us impulse to be present in all the areas of work of the churches. Jesus gives us strength for our will to be at His disposal and gives us strength not to support the patriarchal structure of power and to motivate new liturgy with inclusive models. Jesus also helps us to take care of relationships, of the communion between women to recognize and to contribute for the transformation of the structures. Christ gives us the understanding to organize the capacity-

building of women leadership and helps us in awaking us to the need of integrating more women to participate to reflection groups.

We also discussed where to focus the strength in human rights. As a Latin American group, we think it shall focus towards equality in all countries. Therefore to defend and to put this right into practice is the responsibility of our countries and of our church for this claim to make it a reality.

We also worked on the question on how to heal broken relationships with the excluded persons. First of all, we have to give recognition regarding the exclusion and that one has been injured. Then, we proceed to forgiveness and reconciliation with the evidence of a change. Upon accepting forgiveness, there is the challenge not to sin again. We finally affirm that there must be a change and commitment to claim for correcting; consequently for taking measure for equality.

We struggled with the questions: Do you remove the barrier from the inside or from the outside? Is it a barrier that is inside ourselves which needs to be removed so that we can relate to others and to each other? Is there a gender lens when talking about structures having been broken down for women?

We give the following image to explain: we usually have to change the furniture when we go into a room: i.e. chairs in the big council rooms of our churches as our legs do not even reach the floor; the chairs do not fit us, so we actually have to change the physical structure in the room in order to have the conversation together. We talked about the door opening: is the door open? Do we kick it? Do we look for a key? Is there someone inside who might just open it a little bit and we can push our way in? We talked about the roles on both sides of that and the importance for some of us who get inside to make sure that we put out arm back and bring another with us. We sometimes approach the door expecting it to be locked and it is not. Then we do not know how to act because we have put up a behavior to knock the door down when in fact sometimes it may already be open. We felt that the people who control the door are the people we would like to get this message. When we look at things through a gender lens it is part of this communication that has to happen cross-gender. In fact in most of our locations man holds that power.

So we need to begin to help men so that they can get the door open. Also in our group we talked on how do we take this back home? We would like to report on this back to our church upon our return. Will it be welcome or will it be put in a little paragraph somewhere? We talked about responsibility and accountability to each other. We quickly pointed out 4 items as barriers:

- 1) the whole issue of ordination of women: we think there is a barrier, in particular in the postponing of ordination by churches who already decided to ordain. How do we help?.
- 2) Also we shared the issue of HIV/AIDS. .
- 3) Physical disabilities.
- 4) Decision making is the forth barrier that needs to be addressed in the next conference to find solutions.

THE HEALING SERVICE OF THE CHURCH

Dr Tamara Tatsenko

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States, St Petersburg, Russia

I come from Russia and I represent here the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS). Materials on the subject of the healing service of church from the study book for the Tenth General Assembly of the LWF have been discussed and studied in my women's circle in St Petri Parish in St. Petersburg. Please allow me to share with you results of the discussion.

The church of Christ is in principle, predestined to heal people. This task Jesus Christ has given to his disciples, "...*He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick*" (Luke 9:1-2). On many occasions in the New Testament, it is described how Jesus and the apostles healed people who were ill.

Healing however does not only mean that a human being is freed from physical suffering. Healing is understood in a much broader sense. The church is a place where the Gospel is proclaimed and where people try to live and act in accordance with the world of God. The parish is thus a place where people can experience that, they are God's beloved people, including all their possible shortcomings. The dignity and value of human beings, according to the Gospel, does not lie in his or her capabilities regarding body, spirit, economics or soul, - but in the fact that human beings are created by God, are loved and accepted. Passing on this concept of humankind, in living communion, in worship and sacrament, is the core of the healing task of the church. Church-activities, diaconal and pastoral activities need to mirror and radiate this concept of healing.

For us, Lutherans, the healing service of our church is based on words, prayer and sacrament, all of which find their expression especially in worship as well as in other forms of devotion. God's world is the heart, the core of our belief and our faith, and therefore it carries enormous healing power. "*He sent his word, healed them and saved them so that they did not die*" (Psalm 107:20). Every child, every human being is baptized disregarding the fact that he or she may be disabled or ill. Everyone is invited to join the table of the Lord. In collect prayer we include the sick and the disabled into our community, so that sickness does not mean being excluded from the community. Preaching over and over again expresses this concept of humankind (the concept of God) – the concept that sick and healthy people are likewise images of God. Preaching and sacraments want to convey to people that their lives have a value, and that is worthwhile to live whether one is sick or healthy.

Critique

Especially regarding the healing service for sick people, the worship in the Lutheran church to us women appears to be rather sober and dry. The word of God will very often be watered down, expressions in liturgy and prayer are sometimes poor and inflexible. This feeling, experienced by women in my parish, most probably has to do with the fact that we are all living in an Orthodox country and are consciously or unconsciously under the influence of the folklore and habits of Orthodoxy. Many of us attended Orthodox services during the time when the Lutheran Church was still underground. That is why one often misses – the element of anointing as the visible sign of the gift of the healing power of God's grace – the element of Holy water, - the Holy bread, - making the sign of the Cross...

All these things are especially used in connection with and for sick people in the Orthodox Church. Women in our parish will at times not be afraid to enter an Orthodox Church and to light a candle in front of the altar, and to pray for the health of beloved persons. Why don't they do it with us? This is not a plain argument for accepting Orthodox rites and using them in Lutheran churches. It just makes visible certain weaknesses of our spirituality. It is especially here where the contribution of women could be of great value. Women with their sensitivity, their creativity and flexibility could introduce more life in our liturgy and our prayer. It would be important as well to offer on a regular basis, devotions with prayer for the health of parish members.

The healing power of confession

Luther never put away with individual confession. It is known that confession, speaking out about sin, brings great relief as well as the chance for forgiveness and reconciliation. Through this, internal bitterness is avoided or diminished. Bitterness often leads to physical sickness. It is a pity that the Lutheran church, in most cases, offers only one common, very often formal confession. Traditional individual confession as an element of healing service of the church, has been lost.

Sickness of society as causes for physical illness of people

Sicknesses of society are able to cause human illness on body and soul. During the last ten to fifteen years in Russia, we saw a process of transformation of the system of society accompanied by corruption, abrogation of the juridical system and armed conflicts. The worldwide economic globalization does not exempt Russia, but it makes the country's economic situation even more difficult. The globalization process makes people sick, which can be demonstrated by the following severe elements:

- Misuse of our environment by industries and wars;
- Unemployment or very low wages;
- Abrogation of the social system, especially victimizing women and children.

All together these contribute to prostitution and trafficking of women:

- Massive abrogation of the health system, making it difficult for the majority of people to have access to life-saving medication. Russia has got the highest rate increase of AIDS.
- General loss of Christian values, due to massive propaganda by mass culture, especially through TV.
- The cult of the beautiful, healthy and young human body produces an extremely over-exaggerated significance of the human body and leads to neglecting soul and spirit. This makes people sick. In this way, elderly people will be considered less valuable in society.
- Emphasis on the satisfaction of physical desires by eating well, drinking alcohol and smoking.
- Lack of obligations in human relationships with disastrous results for the family.
- Aggression and violence. Many people in our society experience this disastrous propaganda as a power struggle of evil forces that threaten humanity.

What could churches do for the healing of people in the light of sickness in societies?

- First of all, taking a stand in burning questions, and not being afraid of calling the evil by its name. Not playing the accompanying liturgy for the powerful.

- Refrain from accepting gifts and support from alcohol-, beer- and cigarettes-producing companies.
- Pointing out Christian perspectives of social development and underlining Christian values and advocacy for the weak.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

THE CHURCHES MINISTRY OF HEALING

There were three points:

1. This issue has been carried out in the churches in many ways such as prayers, holy communion, bible study, exorcism, laying of hands, counseling. We encourage the church to continue this healing ministry.
2. We suggest that in doing the healing ministry the church addresses the issue on violence against women and uses the LWF document "Church say No to Violence Against Women" and also provides shelter and financial help to victims of violence.
3. We encourage the church to address social problems which bring sickness to society.



JUSTICE AND HEALING IN FAMILIES

Ms Inger-Lise Olsen

Church of Sweden, Uppsala, Sweden

I would like to start from some experiences we have had in the women's work I have been involved with and that is around the naming of things. I start from this angle.

Once there was an exhibit of Native Indian Art and one element was a long rope and in the rope there were some knots. The text under this item said it had belonged to a woman in that tribe and whenever something important happened in that woman's life a knot was made. The woman who narrates the story by looking at these items, says: "I felt like I was looking into a person's diary" She started to image what was behind these dots; we could think of both happiness and sorrows, grief, love and death. We have tried in our context to think that we have been given a rope at the beginning and we have thought what have been the knots in our lives? What are these experiences that are so important before and after. You could think of yourself if you would be given such a rope. What would be these knots? In church tradition we have some signs of these dots: baptism, confirmation, marriage, funerals. But I would argue, and that is from my experience, working on gender issues for 12 years, that there are so many knots, that means so many important experiences in our lives as women that are never reflected upon, never in a church context at least and we have so many common knots. I am involved in a liturgical movement of naming: naming some of these experiences that we have had as women where we have been left alone. I have come to notice in the Swedish context where I work, that whenever I have a group of 30 women, we have all the variety of experiences there. We have the experiences of having had abortion, miscarriage, some of us live with mental diseases, we have experience of violence, of suicide in our nearest family or community, etc. These are very important knots in our lives and we are working on ways to be healed because by naming, we can also receive the report. Why I mention this today is that when we discuss about families, we have also many of the knots which are related to relationships and families. The most vital thing is to start the naming process. To start the healing is to start the naming. I have also one wish for the prayer books of our churches that we have to stop to pray for those over there with problems and we should rephrase it more like "God we come to you with our lives and our relationships. Be with us also when it turns out the wrong way, when violence comes in. God we urge you to be with us those of us who live with mental or physical handicap". We do not pray for those who have problems as though we are the very nice group. This new reformulation is easy and much more true to life and much more involving. I have also worked in this area of life story "Tell me your story". And those of you who have worked in Christian counseling know that you cannot meet a life story with a pair of words saying right or wrong. A life story is never right or wrong. I worked a lot with Christian homosexuals and we, as church, can deal with the issue. I know that specially talking about sexuality, the pair right or wrong, when you have listened to the story of a young person, does not fit.

While we name or start to tell the story, I would rather use the pair of words: life or death. There are ways of living out my sexuality that leads to death for those I am involved in, for me and for the person I am involved in. There are ways of living my sexuality that leads to life for myself and for my partner. In saying so, you see that I cannot make a difference between hetero-and homosexual love. I would rather use the terms when talking about relationships: what leads to life and what does not lead to life.

Then, what is a family? We use the word very differently: I could say "I am going to cook a nice dinner for my family to-night" and I could say that "I met Anne in the street and since she is my family I could ask her to bake the cake on Sunday". I have used the word family in two different ways and since we are a world of women here we would have our different ways of using the term "family". I will ask you to write on a paper the names of those who belong to your family.

How many people have added names of people who are no longer alive? Did any one of you put the name of your cat, of your dog? In Sweden, many would do it! We see that family means something different for us, it depends on where we come from. It varies between cultures and it varies over time. You could be living in a relationship, break up and you could live as a single person, marry and have step children and so on. Family is very varied. I would come with some facts from Sweden or the Nordic countries.

92% of people getting married are living together sexually before being married. More than 40% of the marriages end up in divorce. Still 75% to 80% of the children live their childhood with both the biological parents. So the myth that no child in Sweden lives with biological parents is not true.

We have 60% of single household in Stockholm; that means that there is only one grown-up with children or only one person living. Then you have the step families, that means that one parents has left, there is a re-marriage and there are different children (multiple choice family!). Then you also have the phenomenon, living apart together: it means that you have a relationship but you choose for some reasons not to live together (maybe because of children, maybe because of work). This is a fact; how does the church react to this in the confirmation classes?

The churches keep talking about the "Christian family". What is the Christian family and where in the Bible do you find the phrase "Christian family"? Look at Jesus who was living with his mother and step-father. Maria, Martha and Lazarus were two sisters and brother living together. Jesus once asked "who is my mother, my brother and my sister?" We know that in the early Christian communities, there were different ways of sharing households and we know that rich widows invited young girls, young women so that they did not have to get married. What I am saying is that the concept "Christian family" is not so easy to find in the text as such. The churches have for some reason, come up with this idea and found it as the best and I would try to say why it is not that simple.

As the churches go on to talk about these Christian happy family, describing single persons as those who are very unhappy and looking for a spouse and doing so while they work for the church, there has been very little interest from the side of the church to try to understand why people choose not to get married and why so many marriages break up. We know that sometimes home is the most dangerous place for many women to be and for children. If you look at the legislation in the Nordic countries, there has been steps where you could not be violent towards one's wife, then towards one's servant and only from ten years ago one could not longer punish your child physically.

The problem, I think, is we have yet to see the reality. Jesus said "The truth will set you free". We, as churches, go on about this happy, happy Christian family and then those who do not fit, do not have a chance. This has caused a lot of problems for men and women who do not fit into this or do not want to fit into this concept. There are many taboos around this, one

may be sexuality which is very central here. It could be also related to homosexuality, to handicap. We have to be more curious and interested to find out why do we chose to live as we do. Is it that all the 92% of Swedish young people who chose to have a sexual life before getting married, are all stupid and they do not know what is best for them? 80% of them are members of the Swedish church.

If you look in the new prayer books, we have added divorce as an area of concern. But where is the prayer for old women who are looking at the photo albums and are preparing for death? I do not know how many of you feel you are old, but is that what you want to do? Stereotypes about old people just looking for death and looking at albums and visiting grandchildren and nothing about breaking of marriage that has brought new lives in certain circle. There are stereotypes and I think if we are working on naming, we have to be more true what life or how complex life is. I am not a fundamentalist and I would argue that there are many passages in the Bible that we (and even fundamentalist) do not follow word for word, be it around slavery, around how women should get dressed, etc. So why are we talking about one man and one woman, why are those phrases from the scripture more important? You have to answer that. Most of us struggle with our lives and life about being in relationship with each other and with God. Then we must also trust in each other that we are trying to make the best of it and that the churches must be of guidance to people who want to struggle with their lives and want to find new forms of showing love and faithfulness. I think it is important for the churches in my part of the world, to stop talking about this happy Christian family with a small house and a dog and two children, when so many people choose to live differently.

I went to a conference of family counseling whose title was "Why on earth do some people live together the whole life through?" I found it a very interesting title. Instead of saying: why do the relationship stop, they say "what are the good factors that could keep a relationship alive?". I also know that some parts of the Nordic churches they have seminar on how can you make a relationship healthy and it starts very often by naming.

I want to underline again the question as to why religions in general are so detailed around the regulations of family life and sexuality? Is it because they want to be in control of women's sexuality. In this case, Christianity is not better. We should be honest and say that we want to be part of this conversation about our bodies, about our sexuality as we have to live together.

Issues of power and sexuality are almost taboo in our context and if we do not start naming here, we will only get into more trouble. I would like us as churches, to trust in the good will of people to find faithful, loving, caring, respectful and equal relationships. Most people will agree that in the relationship when there are children, you need a frame and so on. We have to be open to different ways of solving how people live their sexuality in relationships when there are no small children involved. We have to start that debate in a grown-up way with respect.

Naming is the beginning of healing. Stop the stereotypes. We have to make new prayer books, new examples, new ways of confession, new way of celebrating. "The truth shall set you free". We should respect the choices people make and be in dialogue and be willing to support what love is about. The goal is life in abundance for all and I would trust the will of people to find good and respectful ways to live together. We may, as churches, be more willing to listen to stories, then to tell the truth, when the truth comes from a tradition that has not grounded in our context.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

JUSTICE AND HEALING IN FAMILIES

There were three main points which came out of our discussion on this theme:

1. "No Healing without Naming". The importance of naming the pain and suffering that we experience in our lives, in our close or familiar relationships. There are two particular recommendations:
 - a) training: not only given to our pastors but also to lay leaders. Training should be for all of us to identify and listen to stories. This goes beyond the fact of being ready to listen when someone comes to you, but opening the door to offer opportunities for people to come and share their story. It also means to make available the resources: after listening to a story I might not be able to help, without the necessary psychological training or what is necessary to respond; but to conduct the person in the right direction and to help the person identify the resource for the healing process to continue. We have to recognize that the first step and our responsibility is to hearing the story so that the story is shared and not kept within the individual.
 - b) The second part that we want to share is the need to address the moralistic attitude of the church that can be a barrier to healing. We have to be realistic about the world in which we live and the cultures in which we are part. We need to be opened to hearing about the pain and suffering understanding that people fall short of the high moral expectations of the church. Be ready to respond to that, not by exclusion, not by keeping people from bringing these stories, but encourage them to share the stories so that we can address them as a community and not leaving them alone, in isolation. When the church is not ready to hear the stories and is not prepared to be a source of support, people will find other sources and those sources might be even less equipped to deal with their stories. One participant mentioned the hair dresser and physiotherapy for being places where women go sometimes for support in order to find someone willing to listen. Our churches should be those places.

OVERCOMING VIOLENCE
Ms Linda Post Bushkofsky
Executive Director Women of ELCA
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, USA

I would like to draw on two recent events from the month of October 2002 that create a foundation for us in thinking on Overcoming Violence. We need only turn to the newspaper or TV or radio to know how violence permeates our lives today. Even as we sit here, there are violent acts being committed all across the world. These two particular events are ones that help us to put some perspective on this issue, on how we may overcome violence.

The first was a LWF sponsored event that happened in Africa: The Interfaith Peace Summit. I would like to share the words of one of the participants, because they seem so very telling and as why be there is a specific way that we, as women, need to look at this issue of violence.

"We are mothers. Our duty is to nurture, love and preserve peace. We do not believe in warlike acts. Men cannot assume this role." Further on, in a conversation, the commentator said (specifically as to the African continent): "unless the exploitation of women stops, there will be no future for the African continent." I think each of us could put it in our own context and say that if women did not step forward and act in overcoming violence in some significant way, the world as we know it, will not continue. That is one very real reason why women are called to deal with this issue.

The second event happened on October 21, 2002, when UN General Secretary Kofi Anan was making his report to the UN Security Council. He made a startling report, something that we women already knew, that violent conflicts disproportionately impact on the lives of women and girls. Of course in most instances, women and girls are not part of the violent conflicts, they are the civilians who are not involved but whose lives are forever changed by the violence that does occur. Anan went on to give three instances of how women and girls are disproportionately affected by these events. He said that any existing inequalities between men and women are always exaggerated and made greater for women and girls in the light of violent conflict and that very often women and girls are sent fleeing their borders into foreign lands because of conflict. The third one is that often violent conflicts subject them to sexual violence and torture. Kofi Anan went on, asking the UN Security Council that as they break any peace negotiations in future, they involve women fully in that process and that every aspect of those peace negotiations should take into account the special circumstances of the lives of women and girls so that those peace negotiations accurately reflect a resolution that cares for women and girls in that process.

He said, "Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of men and women."

Almost every one of the issues in our village groups reflect some aspects of violence. It is even more daunting then to talk about overcoming violence. This is a learning moment for the church, giving an opportunity as members of the LWF to be a witness to the world and to say that there is another way.

We do not have to accept the violence that is part of who we are today to be part of who we are tomorrow. It is certainly not what we, in the church, are called to live out. There are so

many aspects of violence; each one of us probably has some aspect of a violent event that we can relate to. With 60 of us, there are probably 60 different types of violence that we have seen. It is very hard to pull out particular ones. I would however identify four specific areas that we could think about, because of their unique impact upon women.

The first is terrorism, and of course that is not just a thing of the 21st century but it is at the forefront of it. In the recent news in the last few weeks, the taking over of the theater in Moscow, the nightclub in Bali that was blown up, the actions in the Philippines – there are so many terrorist acts that happen and certainly threaten us as well. That is one area where attention needs to be spent.

A second area is certainly civil strife and militarism. In the places that we could name where that is a reality, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Pakistan, Palestine, Liberia, Sudan, Iraq. I think of the many ways our churches have been responding to this but yet it is the same. We are faced with that reality of militarism in those places and in many, many more.

The third area that I bring forward to is domestic violence, certainly one has a context within family settings as well and one probably, sadly enough, that transcends every race in some way. It is present in all of our lives in some way, if not for women, for girls. Sexual abuse, psychological abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse. This is a very real issue and one that we have been too long silent about within our cultures and within our church, within our church leadership and one that we must name and respond to because it is a reality in our lives.

The fourth one, clergy abuse: the abuse of relationships that occur physically, psychologically and emotionally, perpetrated by the clergy in our churches. All these four are overt forms of violence.

I want to share another thought on covert violence. We understand overt violence; they are specific acts. But there is also covert violence and the phrase used in the text is "violence of the status quo." It speaks about institutional violence, structural violence. One way it comes to my mind is this: hunger exists in our world and this is an act of violence of the status quo, that we allow that to remain, like in North Korea and in many regions of Africa. In America, where we have 1 out of 5 children going hungry every night, that is something that institutionally we have allowed to remain, or we certainly have not repaired or taken care of and that is certainly as violent in many ways as some of the overt acts which were mentioned earlier.

Now I would like at least to suggest three ways that we can build on some of the specific things that we, as women, do in our lives in the way we look at resolving situations that we can present solutions to some of these situations.

The first of them is to break the cycle of violence. When we think about 10 and 12 year old boys picking up guns and serving in the armies, we know that we must start very early to break the cycle of violence: we must start with the youngest of our children. It makes me think of one of our theologians in the US who had become quite frustrated when she was trying to change the thinking of our bishops. So she started writing books for children because she said she gave up on the bishops but knew she could have an impact on the little girls and boys. That is one area where we, as women, historically have done peacemaking, training young children, both in our own lives, in our families, but also in settings like Sunday school classes and within other teaching moments. We must start at such a very early

age, or else we lose them if they are 10 and 12 and serving in armies or other armed conflicts. One is therefore to lift up our peacemaking efforts that will break cycles of violence.

The second is to enhance conflict resolution efforts that have already been undertaken. I know that this is more a mediation approach to resolving conflict. I was talking to one of our delegates from North America that my experiences as a lawyer and how as a woman and as a lawyer I find it very difficult to work within our system. My approach as a woman was much more to mediate the conflict, trying to end up with a win-win situation for both sides, one that we can always work with. I did a lot of work with family law, I just could not imagine a divorce with fighting over the children, the custody, the support and one wants one side to "win." What one wants is the children to have a good upbringing, and you have to mediate a good resolution. I think there is a unique feminine response to how we deal with conflict and certainly there are many mediation programs that women have engaged in across the world, and we need to enhance that kind of conflict resolution approach.

The third thing that we could do is to engage in our Bible study and help the rest of the church to understand the biblical concept of Shalom. It is one that has escaped so many of us. It is not the absence of war but that whole promise of fullness, of well-being that comes to us: rest, security, wholeness, well-being, prosperity. In the US, it is the women who are engaged in Bible study and it is through this kind of study of the Scriptures that we are able to raise these issues to bring them before our brothers and sisters. It is in that way that we can help and allow the church to reclaim the concept of shalom also in the context of violence that permeates our lives.

Finally, as an American, I cannot stand and speak about overcoming violence and fail to address the looming crisis in Iraq. How presumptuous of me to stand here and lead a discussion about overcoming violence when the governmental leaders of my country are planning to attack another nation. What you need to know is that not all Americans support the President's call for war in Iraq. Christians from many traditions are mobilizing peace efforts, calling for resolutions to this conflict in ways other than military conflict. In fact, this may be the first time that Christians in the US have proactively worked against the start of a war, rather than responding after a war has already begun. The peacemaking efforts are broad and varied, bringing together Christians in new ways, building new alliances, showing our government and the world that there is a different way.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

OVERCOMING VIOLENCE

Violence is such a broad topic that we covered all different types of violence, not only physical, emotional, psychological. The group put forward:

- Gender training for all leaders (not only training as mentioned by Priscilla for the council). We want to go deeper and to the villages and get a gender training done.
- Theological work on this issue has not been done. As long as we do not do it, we will not be understood in certain parts of the church across this world because there is a language that is used in some places that the rest of us do not use. We need to learn it and to communicate. We want to make sure that people know that we support the study on

authority and power which is being done by the Department for Theology and Studies with Karen Bloomquist. We want her to know that this is a very important work. This is not about sex, this is about power. Once this work is done, it will make our work much more easier.

We struggle for years and years about how we help each other in community as we lived with the thought that i.e. I cannot come to Latin America to share my gifts about violence because it will not be understood, or an African woman cannot understand what is happening with women in the United States because it is not the same context. What we need is a network of women against violence cross-culturally around the many church bodies. We would clarify the term tradition, culture, violence and religion. So we can do the cross-cultural work with no excuse and no assumptions. Then, one of the way - as we talked about on how we all learn from each other when we get to visit each other - may be to rethink through what has been called in the past "women to women visits". A team with an African, an Asian, a North American woman would then model this work. After this being done in the first six months, we need to educate the band and form alliances.

We listed particularly in the areas of violence:

- The language issue: not just the liturgical language which is really important, but also swearing and violent language in the conversation and how we use language which is violent to many others.
- Domestic Violence: with both overt and covert violence.
- The area of Structural Violence which needs to be addressed.
- The all issue of overt violence in terms of when women target each other and how do we deal with this.

TRANSFORMING ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

Rev. Sandra Bach

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to introduce to you the very wide and complex issue of economic globalization that is seriously affecting our everyday lives.

My name is Sandra Bach, and I am a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany. At present I am working on economic globalization together with Karen Bloomquist from the LWF and two other ecumenical organizations, WARC and the WCC.

1. “Why do we call something globalization which is NOT globalization but polarization and fragmentation?”

With this question, the Swedish theologian Anna Karin Hammer leads us to what is at the core of the discussion on economic globalization. While today everybody is talking about “one world,” the “one global village,” and about people getting closer and becoming more connected, it remains doubtful whether we are actually living in a global community.

a) What does economic globalization mean?

Those who are speaking about globalization, associate a host of very different experiences, understandings and life-circumstances with this term. Some of you - probably especially those of you from the North - experience globalization as a rather positive phenomenon – providing, among other things, a diversity of lifestyles, the possibility to travel and the availability of a great variety of foodstuffs from all around the globe. At the same time, others are experiencing the contrary: exclusion, exploitation, insecurity and the dominance of Western culture and language.

Politicians use economic globalization for their own ends, supporting globalization if it serves their own political and economic interests, while building up protective barriers against the influx of products and people from the developing world.

How do you experience globalization in your context? As positive – maybe because it is easier to get a job, to get connected with others, to be heard ... or as the contrary?

How do you understand a worldwide community, if everybody uses economic globalization for their own purpose?

What are the various effects of globalization on men and women in your context?

Ideally (in my opinion), globalization would unite people, enable the interdependence of people, and provide enough food, education and work for everybody on this planet. Ideally, the worldwide community would respect the life of every human being - not only of certain rich communities. Ideally, the economy and economic globalization would serve life.

In the Christian tradition, this ideal is described as God’s good world, which God created through her gracious love for the wellbeing of all.

But is this the reality? Are we living in a world where everybody has enough to sustain himself or herself? I am afraid that the answer is NO. And, in fact we are at present facing a shift in the opposite direction.

b) What are the main challenges related to economic globalization?

Over half of the world's population has to live with less than 2 USD per day. Some of you will know what that means. The three richest people in the world own more than the gross national product (GNP) of the forty-eight poorest countries. Increasingly, basic resources such as water, education or other public services are being privatized. The waterways are becoming more and more polluted and many people do not have access to clean water, to food, education or health. Many do not have access to the Internet or to the media that are also ruling the world. This often means that they do not have access to power. A huge amount of money -1.5 billion US dollars every day- are floating around the world unconnected to goods or services. More and more people are unemployed.

Most of you will agree that it is women who are most affected by these threatening developments. It is they who have to bear the greatest burden, struggling in their daily lives, often working under terrible conditions in sweatshops or having to resort to prostitution in order to feed their children.

Men, unable to find jobs in their local communities, often migrate to urban areas to seek employment, leaving behind women who end up having to hold together entire households on their own.

What is the situation of women in your context? Do they have access to the most needed goods? Do they have access to information and power? Who has to care for the family? Who has to provide an income for the family in your context? How does economic globalization change your family structures?

Because of the current developments we are facing a situation, where the economy serves the wellbeing of a few people rather than the whole of humanity. Under our current system, most people have to serve economy rather than the economy serves the people.

What can we as Christians, as women and churches do at this point to challenge and to transform the present system? We are called to intervene there where economic globalization harms us or our neighbor.

c) The second challenge is a mainly a spiritual challenge:

In the face of these developments, most people, churches and entire societies feel a sense of disempowerment, hopelessness and helplessness. Some of you know this feeling only too well: "There is nothing I can do. The problems are too big. Or "This development has nothing to do with me."

This sense of powerlessness or hopelessness reflects a spiritual crisis. It reflects how deeply the current developments affect our daily lives.

How do you experience this feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness? Where do you see the special strength of women to encounter such a spiritual crisis?

1. Who has the power to transform the current structures?

As people of hope we are grounded in faith convictions. We live in this world with the strong vision of God's changing power. We are living in this world with the power of God's love, and not with the greed and quest for more that drives many.

How can we envision this love? What can we do?

Communion – the spiritual basis for resisting and transforming economic globalization.

Through Holy Communion we are interconnected, and according to Luther “changed into” our neighbors, worldwide. The communion is the sacramental and ecclesial reality in which is grounded our identity, how we view one another, and our horizon as individuals and churches.

How can we as women be strongly engaged for a globalization of solidarity?

Trust in our spiritual power, which is grounded in God’s gracious love.

Through this communion a different kind of ability to act begins to emerge. Rather than being an unquestioned reigning power, economic globalization begins to have faces and voices to which we can relate.

How can we as women organize and encourage people?

I know that some member churches are already very engaged in this issue: participating in campaigns to cancel the external debts or discussing the illegitimacy of debt; raising awareness; fighting against privatization etc...

The “call to participate in transforming economic globalization,” which was sent to every member church two weeks ago, summarizes some of these actions and makes a number of suggestions based on our understanding of communion. It shows that LWF and other ecumenical organizations are very much into the issue at the moment.

Besides these actions and suggestions especially the power of women, the trust in our spiritual power, which is grounded in God’s gracious love and which enables us to respond to the call of our sisters and brothers is our strength.

As women, as member churches we can:

- Raise our voices.
- Participate in campaigns to cancel the external debts and work on the illegitimacy of debt
- Educate and train people in finances/economics and make them aware of economic interconnections (also power-question).
- Encourage ourselves and other institutions/organizations etc. to use and support fair trade products.
- Organize and encourage people to become a force to be reckoned with and to enable them to speak with one voice (but with the respect for the different contexts and backgrounds). We should also think about how we could join others, more powerful groups or campaigns (e.g., in the field of fair trade) – work within the civil society on the local, regional and international level.
- Encourage for greater transparency and democratic participation in international financial institutions.
- Advocate for fair, more just trade policies and practices within and among countries.
- To advocate for TAHA where there is told that there is only TINA.
- To network on the grassroots and the international level.
- To raise awareness how especially women are affected by effects of economic globalization.

These are just a few of the many possibilities open to us. Women have the power to transform economic globalization. The worldwide communion of women can fight for a world, which is

- More just
- More accountable to human beings, their communities and the rest of creation
- More live-giving for the sake of the wellbeing of all.

VILLAGE GROUP DISCUSSION:

TRANSFORMING ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

There is little knowledge on economic globalization, particularly among women in the south who have not heard the term. However, they do know that there have been changes in their life style. Things have become more expensive for them and it is becoming more difficult for women to bring order in the economy of the family. We are just following the agenda that is being set by a few rich people and we are serving their interests.

We are also aware that there are changes in our social value system, particularly among youth, both in North and South. This is promoting classes and division among people.

Economic globalization is bringing a new form of spirituality where people turn to God, due to hopelessness and helplessness. Women are now more in the informal sectors which is not protected by law. Economic globalization requires high skilled workers and women are not among them. There is also an increase of exploitation through promotion of sex industries, with a lot of health risks involved.

We, as a church, need to strengthen the proposal of establishing a Commission who would develop on the theme related to "external debt" which means "eternal debt". We recognize that this debt is not payable and that for many years our countries have already paid. We propose the following strategies: - to work in order to build capacity in our churches to know the causes and consequences of the following globalized economy:

- poverty in our countries;
- the neoliberal economy proposal;
- to look for alliances at the ecumenical, national and international levels;
- to be part in which the politics of the economy of your countries are defined and at the international level;
- to promote and reflect on the documents on economic globalization produced in our churches;
- to deliberate on alternatives to confront economy, to continue to support small enterprises, especially women's enterprises and to support small family enterprises;
- to promote a market for women's products or small family produce;
- to make confronting economic globalization and finding alternate ways as part of our daily reflections in congregations.

Issues that need to be carried forward to the Assembly due to economic globalization:

- 1) The education of women should be promoted particularly in the South and promotion of resources to facilitate this process should be looked into.

- 2) The issue of HIV/AIDS: advocacy for access to drugs should be promoted because HIV/AIDS is killing our youth and skilled people, especially in the South and this would mean that North will continue to have upper hand due to economic globalization.
- 3) Globalization will continue to promote cheap labor and increase exploitation and sex industries. So promotion of code of conduct for tour operators should be emphasized. Sex education among young people should also be promoted. There is a need to re-examine our theological understanding on sex education.
- 4) The question of fair trade should also be discussed and an open market for women.
- 5) Training for skills and promotion of research particularly in the South. This will minimize the transfer of technology from North to South which in many cases did not work.
- 6) Developing and promotion of network especially among youth through exchange programs, among schools in the North and South. Most of our youth in the South and in the North do not have much information on what is actually going on around the world.



HEALING CREATION
Ms Katia Maria Cortez
The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope, Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Sisters and Brother,

I come from Central America, a tiny geographic space located in the center of the American continent. We believe that: "God is the creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen...", "That God created existence out of nothingness for the life of humanity". God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the maker of all creation, where everything was for all ... for life. But we see what has happened in these tiny lands.

The countries of Central America, some to a greater extent and others, such as Costa Rica, to a lesser extent, have become over ten times more impoverished in the last four years. In Nicaragua, for example, more than 40% of the population of four and a half million residents lives in extreme poverty. Lands are in the hand of a small group of families. Real unemployment is up to 60% in the economically active population. More than half of the children do not go to class because the schools have been privatized. The most vulnerable members of the population are women, the elderly and children. In Nicaragua, we do not truly know the Biblical verse from Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them".

Women, in Nicaraguan culture, were created only to serve man. This means that the woman is relegated to the home setting because that is the role that God has given her and, although everyday there are more women working outside of the home, the decision-making power continues to be held by the man. The man feels more *macho* when he has more women and, consequently, more children. There continues to be great discrimination against women.

Hunger, drought, poverty wreak destruction in our land. There are no medicines in the hospitals and some people die. Some are killed by dengue (not even having enough money to buy acetaminophen which, at a cost of ten U.S. cents, seems cheap to some, but for those with no money is expensive).

Famine is a term compounded with sadness and pain. People have nothing to eat, drought or flooding have prevented the land from producing anything. Added to the coffee crisis, the problem becomes one of famine, an expression of death. I could spend hours telling you about the misfortunes of our Central American people so that together we would come to ask: What happened to God's creation? And we have to confess that creation is broken, it is ill. That, as some theologians say, there is a lamentable situation of *decreation* and we cry as Ezekiel did in 37:11: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off".

But NO...!!! NO...!!! Our faith in the God of Life is great. In the God of Exodus that freed Israel from slavery to Egypt and brought the people to the promised land. We believe in Jesus through whose death and resurrection we have new life, a new creation. And through his grace we know that He is on our side so that in our countries there may be life, although for now it is not abundant. We feel like the prophet Isaiah in 43:19, "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?". And we can say, with much satisfaction, that in Jesus, God is doing this with our Lutheran Churches, Diaconic Churches that bring the good news, proclaiming an integral ministry where the Gospel takes on life with the life of the community. The diaconia program of the Lutheran Church of Nicaragua

continues its project of child education centers, the project of women's training centers and the comprehensive health program. But the latter involves organizational activities, training and supplying medications and basic equipment to the rural health promoters that serve 30 almost inaccessible communities. These communities are at constant risk, given their vulnerable situations which seem to worsen instead of improving. The "Faith and Hope" Lutheran Church of Nicaragua develops its diaconia with highly vulnerable populations, through its Office of Diaconia and Development.

Integral ministry emerges from the pedagogy of Jesus: teaching and practice. Any action undertaken by the church is ministry; the medical clinic is health care ministry, and the same goes for all church projects

The activities combine formal and theological educational services for children, theological training and special training for leaders and pastors that serve pre-teen and adolescent populations, men and women, who then go on to multiply the teaching.

We rejoice that God has made creation for all women and men, and that God is also in the suffering of the people. We have projects that help us to call forth our image as children of God. We are in the midst of those that suffer and also at their sides. We believe that God restores life and cures the sick and resurrects the dead. We believe that God calls us in this situation of *decreation* to announce, by our own witness, the creation "as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will", John 5:21.

I invite all of you present to be carriers of the love of God in this world. I invite you to be God's eyes in order to see the injustices and to be God's hands to do good in the midst of those who are suffering.

On behalf of the peoples of Central America, I tell you that, although we seem to be condemned to a world that has become a valley of lamentations and tears, our faith gives us strength to say that: ONLY GOD SAVES AND GOD ALWAYS LISTENS TO THE CLAMOR OF HIS PEOPLE.

We have faith that God is with us and therefore we have hope that, sooner rather than later, God will change this world of pain to a world of love.

Thank you.

BIBLE STUDIES



HEALING IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari, Vice President LWF

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 25: 1-44

Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.

Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep which he was shearing in Carmel. His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.

While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. So he sent ten young men and said to them "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. Say to him: Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!"

Now I hear that it is sheep shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not ill-treat them and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable towards my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them."

When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited. Nabal answered "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my sharers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"

David's men turned round and went back. When they arrived they reported every word. David said to his men. "Put on your swords!" so they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. Yet these men were very good to us. They did not ill-treat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no-one can talk to him.

Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five sacks of roasted corn, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you". But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending towards her, and she met them. David had just said, "It has been useless – all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"

When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name – his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent.

Now since the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging your self with your own hands, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. Please forgive your servant's offence, for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. When the Lord has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord has brought my master success, remember your servant.

David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.

Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought to him and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request."

When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak. Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise be to the Lord, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept me from doing wrong and has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head."

Then David sent words to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife."

She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, "Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants. Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David's messengers and became his wife. David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

My dear Sisters, I chose this story deliberately because when I tried to use the same story at another occasion, only 4 hands out of 400 audience knew the story earlier. It is not a familiar story because it is a woman's story.

"Healing in Interpersonal Relationships"? What do we mean by the theme? It assumes that relationships are broken and that there is sickness in relationships. As women, how do we experience this broken relationships? How many of us have experienced violence in our families, either psychological or physical? How many of us have witnessed the violence whether psychological or physical between our parents? How many of us have experienced a pressure from our religious leaders? How many of us have experienced civil war in our countries, in our societies? We can enumerate the list. Very often in women circles, I have heard only of matters related to women's problems and their sickness.

Today I opted to take us a little beyond ourselves to see how our world is, because as women, we are part of the world in which there is a wider problem and a greater sickness. When LWF Council decided on the theme "For the Healing of the World", I was part of that decision. We discussed this theme, particularly in the focus of healing because the world was in such a sick situation and the theme that was chosen two years ago is more apt today than ever before. Having began to reflect on the Assembly theme at different occasions I have began to realize how broad our Assembly theme is and what a Herculean task it is to heal the world. Do I sound a pessimist? I am not; I think that in my different positions, both at national, international, church leadership responsibilities and travels to many parts of the world, I have seen enough.

Let me share a few examples from the world's reality. All of us have heard about 9.11. It has become a technical term for the problem. 9.11 was the day when the hope and aspirations of the victims and their families came to ground Zero.testifying to the reality that hate and violence is at its peak. Under the guise of eliminating terrorism hundred of thousands people in Afghanistan are either killed or made homeless. Has the terrorism been eliminated from Afghanistan? The question is an answer. The efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, the hard topic for today, have eliminated innocent children, widowed many women, disabled many women and men. Has the purpose been achieved? Still this genocide of Iraq's innocents continues. The efforts to make Saddam Hussein powerless killed 500'000 innocent children after the imposed sanctions. This number of children dead are more than the one who died in Hiroshima bombing.

Two years ago at a seminar organized by LWF in Geneva, I heard the voices of one Palestinian and one Israeli woman who were pleading to let their children live. Many such voices I have heard when traveling in Israel in June this year with the members of the Executive of the LWF. They are crying for peace and communal harmony, right in the midst of loud noises of the tankers and the firing.

Day to day reality in Africa, in India, Indonesia and many other parts is that Christians are wounded because of their faith and there are killed because of their commitment to serve God. Religious intolerance is steadily on the increase, many have lost their lives because of their faith, their human dignity had been taken away and their rights usurped. As Karl Marx remarked that "Religion is the opiate of the masses", it has become the

instrument to oppress the vulnerable. Rich countries are asking for the lives of our children for their economic gains by selling arms and munitions to poor countries. While several millions die of hunger and HIV/AIDS richer communities are also dying of overeating and too much comfort. No doubt, it is the powerful that strike the powerless, even in the struggle of two powerful bodies, it is the innocent and the vulnerable who are crushed and victimized.

But the question is, why 9.11 and why so many innocent suffer? Why women are continuing to plead for life and are begging to let their children live. As Jeremiah cries out: "Is there a balm in Giliad?" Is there a healing from hate and desire to kill the vulnerable? Will there ever be recognition that life is a precious gift of God? Women are silenced and oppressed by patriarchal systems and structures. Male-female interpersonal relationships are broken by male chauvinism. There is so much violence in families. In our communities, the colored people and the people of different nationalities are discriminated against. Husband and wife do not see eye to eye anymore, and as a result every second marriage is a broken marriage. Children have begun to experience living with two or more mothers and fathers. HIV/AIDS has made several millions of children orphans. In spite of scientific advancement in cloning, in test tube babies, there are still no answer to terminal diseases like cancer and HIV/AIDS.

The environment also is groaning for healing. There is no part of life that does not need help and wholeness in this world today. In the genuine effort to create safe heaven, human beings have created more sickness and more pain, both in interpersonal relationships and in society, both within the country as well as internationally. We women, know it too well because we are the worst victims of all this chaos. Pain and sickness, violence and abuse, silence and oppression are our day to day portion. Instead of healing our wounds, even religion has contributed to our pain. God's beautiful people were made no people today. The pain of brokenness is seen in all areas of life in different forms and different expressions and the vulnerable and the powerless are made more powerless and victimised. Why are we not able to live a healthy life?

Leslie Stall, a correspondent and reporter of CBS News in the United States, while referring to the death of children in Iraq due to sanctions, asked Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State of the US State Department this question: "We have heard that more children died in Iraq than in Hiroshima; is the price worth it?" She promptly responded: "We think the price is worth it". What did she mean? That we think the price is worth because it is trying to eliminate terrorism? Does it mean that half a million children have no worth whatsoever in this struggle between two powers, United States and Iraq? Are these half a million children considered non-entities? Is it just to include vulnerable children, women and oppressed to be victims of our power games? Can we women, insignificant as we are, do something about this world sickness? Children's paintings recently, after US voted in favor of war against Iraq, said "we do not want war, or even oil, we want peace"...Are the children saying something?

Economic globalization has a positive impact for the well-be multi-national corporations. I was rather surprised that the common people in the US do not have an idea even how

this globalization is affecting the third world countries. The weaker sections of all society are raising their voices against economic globalization. Do those who globalize care to hear? Golden straight jacket as the New York Times economist Thomas Friedman, refers to it, is far from a neutral, inescapable phenomenon. 21st Century global marketers are more selective than ever before and they want our kids. They exploit cheap labor in the third world and the land of the poor nations. The vulnerable are silenced and uprooted from their own lands.

We live in an era and thus all rules and models for common good no longer apply. The rules say: "Ours is a global economy governed by a competitive logic that constantly seeks lower and lower production costs. Those low production costs are possible due to utilization of third world cheap labor". This race is profit oriented, not life oriented. In this context, the conventional wisdom says: "we cannot shape the future, we do not have choices; it says that there is only one part open for us, that is the game of the jungle. In other words, the survival of the fittest. In this game, when one praise over the other, can we bring help and wholeness and build a healthy community? I doubt it.

I have given you a glimpse of the reality of the world today as part of my bible study. What will it take to restore health and wholeness and to build a global community of equals? Is there anything that we as women, are able to do in such a situation? We have a good example to refer to in our day to day life as well as the example shown in the Bible.

The text from I Samuel speaks about a woman who intervened in a situation where there could have been a severe bloodshed and killing of all males in that community. Probably Abigail was the only woman in the Bible that I know of, who is referred to as "intelligent". There are many women in the Bible that are seen as "beautiful". Even today the world sees women as "beautiful", that has different connotations. It could be an admiration of the beauty God has given, or it can imply that women are sex objects. But to explain or identify a woman as "intelligent" speaks volumes because this woman Abigail was living almost 3'000 years ago when there was no understanding whatsoever of the feminist rights. She was the one who intervened and prevented bloodshed.

What will it take to build a global community? Let us see how Abigail had done it. She was part of a social culture of an arranged marriage. Nabal, her husband, was wealthy and according to the Bible, he was also bad tempered. His name also implies that he was foolish and the explanation given about his character is that it is impossible to reason with him. This intelligent and beautiful woman was sharing her life with such a person. David, in the story, has given protection to Nabal's property and his men. He protected them from the Philistines' attack and also their animals from being attacked by wild animals. It is traditional according to the story to have large parties and guests and to expect recognition for the services during the time of sheep rearing. It is at this time David sent his servants to receive recognition for the services he has rendered to Nabal.

David worded his greeting to Nabal like this: "Peace be with you, peace be to your house and peace be to all that you have". We all know that David was a man of God; he feared God and that is the reason why he did not even attempt to react to Saul when he was

trying to kill him. It is this struggle between Saul and David that made David to hide in the wilderness and made him to come in contact with Nabal.

In his greeting, he also shares how he gave protection to Nabal's property and to his people and he also shares links between Nabal and David by saying: "I am your son David". David was so generous in greeting him with great words of peace to him and to his household and to all that belongs to him and also giving the connection as a son. Nabal's response is: "who is David? Who is the son of Jessie? In his response, he implies as if David was one of the run-away slaves. To this extent he humiliates David and also fails to recognize the service rendered to him. This is the situation always that creeps up the problem in our relationship: one person tries to relate, the other person always either goes higher or blind in not recognizing the relationship.

David, the moment he heard what Nabal responded, immediately his response was "pick up your swords and be ready to war. Let us kill Nabal, let us kill all the male members of the family." This is the response sometimes because "self" plays so much. As long as a person is recognized, it is easy to maintain the relationship. When something goes wrong, then even the so-called "good" becomes blind.

In this story, my question is: "Why did the servants of Nabal went to Abigail to explain the situation and not to Nabal? It is not really appreciated by a wife when a servant comes and complains about the husband, although we criticize our own husbands. But this time, the servants rightly recognized where to go and how to solve problems. They played the right role in approaching the right person at the right time. They go to Abigail and say: "This is what happened, this is what was the request and this was the response from Nabal". Was Nabal right in responding the way he responded or was David right in responding the way he responded to Nabal's response? Or were the servants right in approaching Abigail instead of Nabal?

According to their culture all the three were wrong, even Abigail was wrong, by doing what Nabal did not want to do. If culture had played its role, there would have been war and bloodshed. As the Bible says, Abigail assessed the whole situation in a fraction of time. She saw what could be the real consequence. Although culture prevented her, although it was a matter between her and her husband's relationship, although it was beyond her ability to prevent David and his powers, still she did not fail to act at the right time.

Abigail both in action as well as in her words showed to David that he did have the power and apologized. Although she was not involved in it, she took upon herself the blame. It was not only to protect her household, but also to protect the bloodshed that David was intending to. At the same time, although she was trying to apologize and appease the anger of David, she did not forget to bring to David how wrong he was. She played a double game, a double role in this situation and she tried to correct what her husband did and at the same time she also tried to correct David who was the chosen instrument of God for a purpose. If Abigail had not been involved, there would have been bloodshed on his hands, even if he was the chosen one of God, David recognized her intelligence; he

recognized that he was wrong and that she brought him to his senses and thanked her for that.

We do know that Abigail did something wrong as per their culture; she went without informing him, she took all that Nabal tried to deny to David and she left the house without his knowledge. She did everything wrong to her husband, but at the same time, her action prevented her own husband being killed. Her action against her own husband, according to the cultural expectation, protected him from possible danger.

Abigail was smart, she is intelligent and active. Her action was helpful in building relationships between David and his men and Nabal and his men. And this relationship of one insignificant woman who built it, had assured continuity of life to many hundreds of people and their families. If we wait for culture to solve our problems, or our husbands to give us permissions, if we wait for religion to give us green signal to change interpersonal relationships, I am more than convinced that we will not have that time. But if we can take steps like Abigail, if we can step out of our comforts at the point of even risking our own relationships with our own families, with our own communities for the common good and if we take that lip of faith in the name of God's and with the strength of God's spirit, then it is possible for us to build relationships, life for all of us including our environment and also find life for our kids.

God created a beautiful world order. We, human beings, for our selfish reasons and profit oriented programs have made this world a market, where one person profits and another person loses. Instead of making this world a market place, let us make this world a home for common good. The effort of each one of us, however insignificant it may be, is very important. The role we play in our own situations is as important as the role played by the world leaders. Our still small voice, beginning with our prayers and asserting with confidence and making it heard is what we need to do in this chaotic situation.

I would like to close with one story that happened in India. We had a missionary couple from Australia who came to spread God's love in Indian soil. The Hindu fundamentalists who did not want Christian values in that place, took steps when the husband and two sons were sleeping in a car in a forest and poured petrol on the vehicle and the three were burnt alive. The pain was deep and the loss was irreparable. When the media went to his wife – Gladys Stain - and asked her whether she was scared and whether she has a message to give to the nations at a time like that, she said: "I forgive the criminal and the love that brought us to India will be the love that will transform his life". That message rang loudly all over the country in all our newspapers and audio-visual aids. They may never hear what Jesus said on the cross: "I forgive for they do not know what they are doing!".

Things can be changed. Our still small, but clear voice can become a real instrument to transform the gloomy situation. May God bless you and the spirit empower you to become agents of transformation in this chaotic world. Amen.



HEALING THROUGH SPIRITUALITY:

Ms Jennie Nordin

Uppsala, Sweden

Luke, 13:10-17

A crippled woman healed on the Sabbath

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her:

"Woman, you are set free from your infirmity". Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler became indignant and said to the people, *"There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."*

The Lord answered him, *"You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham and Sara whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"*

When he said all this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Lola Maria

I sat down, starting to work with my reflection but did not recognise the woman in the book of Luke. I could not identify myself with her in the beginning but then I remembered I had met her.

It was a sunny day, hardly any cloud in the sky with a bit of moist air. We had left the car because the road could not bear it and walked the last distance. Two nuns were my company on this visit, they had often visited her. They warned me that the daughter in law could be hostile, not comfortable with them visiting Lola Maria.

We walked to the road that lead straight to some houses made of wood and cardboard pieces, covered with straw and palm leaves to protect from sun and rain. The first one to greet us was the family's karabaou, the water buffalo taking a rest from the hard work of plowing the land.

Instead of entering one of the houses, the sisters takes me to the backside where a small hut, not more than two to three square meters, placed on poles to prevent the tiny house from being washed away in the floods. "It is the old hen house" one of the sisters whispered. In here was the former head of the family. Lola Maria, she did not know her age because she did not know how to read or write but she recited parts of the Bible using

her memory. The family gave her a bath once a month, the space in the hut was so tight she could hardly sit up straight and she was left with the scraps of the family's dinner to feed herself. Needless to say she was very thin.

The sisters told her that they had the money now to build Lola Maria her own house, a proper house instead of living in the hen house. Lola Maria was a bit worried about leaving the hen house, because it was so familiar to her and not totally believing that it could be true, that she would be able to sit up if she wanted to because she could not walk.

I left Lola Maria, thanking her for letting me see her and together we asked for God's blessing. Lola Maria is that old woman in the Bible to me, the crippled woman who upon our visit in a way took her first step of being set free.

Boundaries: Who Sets them and Why?

Jesus says in this passage in Luke: "to be set free of what bound her". With her he meant the older woman. These are words that I have reflected upon and I would like to share them with you today: *"to be set free of what bounds you"*.

The people around the woman

The Sabbath ruler was criticising Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. He took the Sabbath as an excuse to hold this woman back from the opportunity of being healed. To have her set free from what bound her. When do we set boundaries for each other? Limit our life spaces with comments like: *"You cannot do that!"* defining another person's options and choices or *"I would never do that!"* also there setting the standard for what is right and wrong.

A different conference

About two years ago, I participated in a women's conference. It was a different conference in many ways. I had never participated in a women's conference where the experience of the participants were so integrated into the program or where the leadership of the conference were so open to seeing this conference as a process. That was truly a spiritual experience.

But it was also somewhat an experience of frustration. I did not quite feel that I talked the same language as the other participants. All of them were older and also more experienced than me. To describe yourself as a feminist was very foreign to me. As a person of the younger generation and with a Western individualist thinking, I revolted against what I believed was a narrow minded view. Since then I would not say that I have grown wiser although I am older but I have often asked myself what it was I reacted so strongly against. Was it my perception, that being a feminist, meant that I had to walk the same road as my fellow sisters at the conference? That I thought that I had to measure a certain standard in order to be approved as an "aware and good woman?"

Or was I blind to the battles they had fought to grant me access and rights in the church? By not taking in what the other participants talked about- did I then set boundaries for myself? Upholding boundaries that someone sometime taught me to hold? Structural

boundaries- standards for what is right or wrong laid down in a system, is hard to come around. First you have to see it, then you have to learn how to access it and change it or tear it down and build new systems.

Women as the sole financial supporter for her family being exploited as migrant worker or prostitute, glorified by some churches as a modern hero, sacrificing herself as a modern heroine. Or when a 11 year old girl have been sexually abused and the court finds that there are reason for lower penalty because the girl confesses having a crush on the child molestor, claiming that their relationship had the nature of a romantic affair.

The woman herself

The woman, who has not even been written by name in Luke's Gospel, changed. She was set free by Jesus, yes, but also, and this is to me very important, she straightened up herself when called upon by Jesus. It was not him that literally had to bend her back up again. He saw the power in her and released it but she was her own person. The woman herself as a change maker. The power that women have, enduring burdens for years, struggling to survive, to make a difference is to often talked silently or not at all. These women, and we as women, are change makers.

Martha and Mary

When I read this of the crippled woman in the Bible, I immediately thought of two other women. Mary and Martha, which can be met previously in the book of Luke.

Jesus came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary who sat and listened to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked: "*Do not you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!*" "*Martha, Martha,*" he answered, "*you are worried and upset about many things, but only one things but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.*"

These women are often played out against each other, or we tend to side with one of them. I have often wondered what their relationship was and seen them as a symbol of the conflict we, as women, face. Being torn between the practical things we feel we have to do, and the wish to be able to focus on ourselves and our needs. Mary had made her own individual choice. She was not dependent on a man for her own wellbeing. He did not tell her to sit down, she chose to sit down herself. Martha had not been able to do that; to separate her own wishes and needs to what she believed others expected her to do. Thus is my parallel to the older woman.

Mary who does not help her sister and Martha who tries to set a standard for what is right and wrong. Why is that? What did Martha feel in that moment? Is it possible that she herself felt a conflict between what had to be done and what she wanted to do? Of course we can be different as persons but who set the boundaries for her? What would have happened if she, as her sister had sat down to listen, took time and reflected about her life and what Jesus said? But no, maybe that was impossible in her mind. Perhaps that would

have been a sign of not being successful, not being a dutiful woman, in fact, failing as a woman. Where does this fear of failure come from? Who ever taught us that we need to fear failure? Is it an individual problem? Or is it female problem? Although there are seldom one single factor to a problem, I would say it is a problem in our churches, our communities and society. All these expectations are carried by women for centuries, day in and day out, hour by hour, minute by minute. And the fear of not meeting these expectations makes our backs feel heavier and heavier, some die at young age, others are diagnosed of being burned out.

To carry burdens, is walking as much with one's eyes to the ground, never being able to look up, to walk straight as the old woman. Or being invisible but as heavy as a stone, the burden of our own personal expectations, other people's expectations and expectations from structures in the community and society.

Healing through spirituality

What do the words mean, "healing through Spirituality"? I would start by saying that the church can never be a church worthy of it's name, calling to communion with God, Jesus and other Christians unless women's situation and life issues are reflected, addressed and implemented in the theological and social mission of the church.

And so, healing through Spirituality can only be achieved when we create the room, time and different languages, verbal and non verbal:

- Identifying boundaries set by ourselves, by others or in unjust systems and organisations.
- Knowing what boundaries we need to relieve from ourselves or each other
- Having a gender sensitive spirituality

The spirits of the women and men committed to God and the church need to challenge unjust values, which limit women to single-minded images. As sisters in this world and the church, children of God, daughters of Eve, we need to help one another and ourselves to release us from boundaries and burdens. Each one of us are role models and "change makers". We set an example to younger generations and our community when we meet each other with respect for different contexts, walking different paths of life, but above all recognising that

"Your story may not be my story but it is our story".

HEALING THROUGH JUSTICE

Rev. Patricia Cuyatti

President of Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lima, Peru

Luke 18:2-8

What is justice?

"Justice is having electricity, roads, water, work . . . but how can there be justice if my neighbours two blocks away, do not have water and many are unemployed? I believe that justice would mean that everyone has the same opportunities. Really, what I can talk about is, injustice, that's easy for me, it's like daily bread. Now, to think about justice . . .

Mirta V., Collique – Comas/Lima

Justice was the "duty of certain medieval courts which formed the pinnacle of the administration of justice; in some cases it came to be the highest authority after the royal authority" (Diccionario de Lengua Española, p.800).

Justice is also defined as:

- A virtue which gives everyone that which is due or belongs to them
- Right or entitlement. That which is due with regard to this right and entitlement.
- Penalty or public punishment.
- A denunciation against an unjust situation

Aristotle affirmed justice as "giving to each person his or her right."

The Bible demonstrates justice from the way in which we understand God:

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you." Psalm 89:14 NRSV

The term Go'el¹ helps us understand the meaning of God as just and righteous. Goél comes from the word Go'al which means to liberate. Go'el is the person who liberates, rescues, redeems, protects and even avenges blood.

The Go'el identified with God refers to that close family member who intercedes or always acts to protect and help those near to him or her. Thus, God is the one completely identified with God's people, God calls us out from God's family.

In God's role as defender, God demonstrates justice and righteousness which arises from the profound love God has for God's family. There is no choosing or favouritism in the bestowing of God's favour, rather God is inclined to defend the most needy, the impoverished. For this reason, God is known as:

Father of orphans and protector of widows

is God in his (God's) holy habitation.

God gives the desolate a home to live in;

(God) he leads out the prisoners to prosperity. . . .

Psalm 68:5,6 NRSV

¹ Detailed explanation by G. Guitierrez in Dios de la Vida, pp.64-67

Beginning with promise of blessing through the descendants of Abraham, God gives the responsibility to the practice of justice and righteousness, to do all that is good and correct (Genesis 18:19) so that the promise of love and blessing become a reality. From then on, carrying out the responsibility to live justly and honestly became a constant challenge.

1. Justice as an Expression of Faith

The passage describes the great distance that exists between the two characters:

On the one hand, *a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people*, and on the other, *a widow who had a complaint*. The inequality jumps out at us, the woman is a widow and is alone in seeking justice.

The judge has no fear or respect for God and consequently the situation and condition of the woman does not matter to him at all. What does “fear of God” mean? To fear God has to do with the bond one has with God. It does not refer to a paralysing relationship, nor is it a feeling which frightens and neutralizes.

Fear or respect is the result of living closely together with someone that one loves. To fear God then is a commitment to live imitating God’s love and care towards human beings. This common life is possible only when one knows God.

Knowing God means an experience of life moved by God’s love. Under this influence we receive and embrace the responsibility to live in service, and, as a consequence, we commit ourselves to pay attention to all persons, concerning ourselves with their needs, problems and wants.

To know God and to work justice commits us to the vocation of putting ourselves on the side of defenceless persons, of seeking alternatives in the face of injustice, whatever it might be. Justice is a result of divine inspiration, of the faith that meets us and moves us on behalf of life.

To work justice is the result of our bond and relationship with God. It is the result of the faith that *permits us to pass over into God’s own terrain . . . to announce the Gospel.*² This event is evidence of the merciful relationship between human beings and God, between the giver of life and God’s family. Indeed, where there is no fear of God, there will be no respect for persons. Injustice is converted into a tool of discrimination, oppression, violence and exclusion.

2. Justice Heals and Improves Life

“*Grant me justice against my opponent*” is the cry of a helpless person. Her situation as a widow puts her in a situation of exclusion from her society and impedes her from being the subject of her own actions. It puts her in a position of inequality with other women. Her outcry expresses helplessness, inability to be in charge of her situation, suffering, pain and abandonment.

² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *El Dios de la Vida*, p. 78

The decision of the judge to defend her comes from his search for personal peace and freedom from irritation: *"I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming."* "Isn't it that this judge is trying to protect his reputation or his personal position? That he does not want to have any more headache shows his concern for himself. In any case, he is looking not to be discredited in front of the rest of the authorities and society, in completing the commitment his vocation as a judge demands and even less so to showing respect for other people.

The boldness of the widow results in creating a new attitude in this unjust judge: *"Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice"*. We do not know the details of the widow's case, but her persistent search for vindication points out the importance of the matter for her. In the end, justice will not liberate her from her opponent and it is possible that it does not bring punishment or penalty to the opponent. What the widow is asking for is a verdict of support against his injustices. This verdict will be her daily refuge, a significant decision which will permit her to live day by day, without the torment and mistreatment which comes from being alone and in difficulties. For her, justice is the restoration of her condition, it is a bit of peace, a light in the midst of darkness.

To be defended means to have someone on your side. Although it will not be the judge who is on her side, the verdict becomes the vindication and healer of the condition of her life. In any case, to be able to count on having someone with her would be worth more to her and it is possible that after the verdict, other people would offer her their support too. Without a doubt, this healing will bring improvement to her life and to her relationship with the person who has been her opponent and to her community. Healing brings these two aspects: peace to the person herself, and peace to society. If these were the natural practice of society, it would be easier to define justice.

For this reason, we are still left with the task to revise and propose alternatives to some concrete topics: the e(x)ternal debt and the consequent dependency and impoverishment of those countries called as 'the third world'; revision of the regulations and economic proposals of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; revision of the norms and principles of the FTAA (Free Trade Agreement for the Americas, *ALCA in Spanish*) and others are of vital importance for the healing and social welfare of thousands of people.

3. Justice creates Hope

God is always attentive to and on the side of God's chosen people. But the difficulty always arises in the human race with reference to the question "Will God find faith on earth?" There is no doubt that persons committed to the mission and vocation of serving, doing justice, restoring and creating hope are in a minority.

Although it seems obvious that the unjust conditions of the world will not improve, the text leaves us with the challenge to live in a way which expresses signs of the coming

reign. This means that the church must maintain its commitment of healing through the Word and Sacrament and also persistently seek to defend persons through other agencies.

Embracing the commitment of being Church and forming part of the family of God lead us to the constant and persistent search for justice. We do not bring about justice in order to protect our reputation or credibility. Nor are we motivated by the exhaustion or headache which the persistent harassment of the most needy cause us. To stand up for the needy will stem from love because we have known love.

What will we do in the face of situations of injustice? We already have a valuable example in the participation of the churches in the Truth and Justice Commission in South Africa. In Peru we have the challenge that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may grant peace and offer a new beginning for many people who suffered the pain of the disappearance of their loved ones. I hold the conviction that as the family of God we have the possibility to mediate in areas where the voices of marginal persons or of those who are seen as having little value because they are poor, or children, women, widows can be heard.

To work justice always has a cost. Is it for this reason that it is difficult for us to affirm justice with our lives? Does this explain why it is easy for many people to define *injustice*? We have the challenge of our daily confession—it can create hope and restore relationships and living conditions. I urge you to take on this task as a sign that God lives in us and we in God.

HEALING THROUGH PEACE BUILDING
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE BUILDING IN AFRICA: Luke 19.41-42

Ms Loe-Rose Mbise
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Introduction

Healing through peace building is not very easy issue to talk about in Africa though everyone agrees that it is the very same issue that is required for Africa. The current status in Africa makes many people be demoralized, when they talk about healing and peace building.

In my reflection with you, I ask you to still keep in mind the current status of Africa as of today and to see beyond.

The Continent of Africa has a total of 29,367 sq. km with a population of about 762.17 million people according to 1998 figures. Of these people, 43.0% are in the range 0 -14 years old and 53.6% are in the range of 15 - 64 years old. 50.2% of the whole population are females. Many of countries of Africa got their political independence in the 1960's and another large group in 1970's. The people of Africa speak many dialects. Today, some of African countries have been in war situation for more than a decade even after attaining the political independence. More than half the population of African people lives on an income of \$ 0.65 a day. The list could go on and on. The list that discourages people and demoralize many people. The list that say's "There is no hope of healing and peace building for Africa"

In Luke 19: 41-42, Jesus wept when he saw the city of Jerusalem. In the Bible, there are three accounts where Jesus wept. I do not know how many people are surprised or embarrassed by this phenomena. I am however glad that Jesus wept because it is an indication that being emotional is equally good and important as it shows passion and concern. Jesus' weeping shows God is not at some distant universe but rather at the very heart and center of issues that are of concern to us.

Jesus wept for the city of Jerusalem not because the city had revolted against the Roman Empire and was thus in war with the Roman Empire. Jesus wept not because people were dying and many difficult situations were surrounding the people of Jerusalem city. What was happening in the city of Jerusalem was disheartening, but that was not what made Jesus weep. When Jesus looked at the city of Jerusalem, in its state of war, hunger, sickness and turmoil he saw OPPORTUNITIES for peace building for the city and it is people. The opportunities, which were so vivid and clear to Jesus. Jesus wept because the people of Jerusalem did not see those opportunities. "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!" He told them.

The people of Jerusalem could not recognize opportunities for peace building for themselves and their city, they were so much used to the turmoil that was happening then.

It is for this reason Jesus wept. Jesus knew that opportunities had to be seized and the people of Jerusalem were not doing that, their eyes were not seeing those opportunities.

My dear Sisters, could it be the same for Africa? Are there opportunities for healing through peace building in Africa? Who is seeing those opportunities? Who is seizing these moments filled with opportunities? Are we so much used to see sufferings in Africa that we no longer recognize opportunities for peace building? Jesus is reminding us today that even you Africa, there are opportunities for peace building, seize the moment!

I want to share with you some very few examples of opportunities for peace building in Africa.

The courage, will and the determination of African people

Some people may see the division that was enforced and perpetuated to the people of Africa and not recognize the unity and the will for peace building that is in the African People. I was humbled when we visited a slum in Maputo, and residence of that slum who are quite ordinary people many of whom are struggling to ensure that their children get some education. Presidents who themselves do not have a college education, were singing "Africa we will win". Time is moving on, let us go." These residents gave me hope because they demonstrated an opportunity that needs to be recognized and utilized. The quest for peace building is not matter for Presidents of African nation or their ministers, neither is it in the hands of Bishops or other religious leaders. It is not in the hands of the elite and the educated. The ordinary and the common people in Africa want peace. This brings healing for the African people. If I in Tanzania know that people in Mozambique, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Liberia and other countries think not only about peace for their own countries but also for Africa as a whole, I feel healed. I know there are many of such ordinary people all over Africa who say, "Africa we will win".

The Unity of African people

The colonial division that was done to Africa, has for a long time kept African people apart. However, in my opinion, the tragic situations of civil wars, colonization, apartheid in many African countries has brought many people together and have broken down the barriers. Many refugees who moved to different parts of Africa have learnt to speak other languages and have learnt cultures of host countries. Do we recognize an opportunity there? We can turn this hurting issue of refugees into an opportunity that will enable future generations not to have to undergo the same experience again. The many displaced people in Africa are opportunities for forming forum of relationships and cooperation. For example, now Tanzania is not a stranger to Burundi, Rwanda, Mozambique, South African, Zimbabwe, Congo and others, and also Kenya is not a stranger to Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan etc, Nigeria is not a stranger to Sierra-Leone, Ghana, and Liberia is not a stranger to Sierra Leone, Ghana etc. Somehow, we are all connected and the division which we think, exists, is actually not there. I know in Tanzania, there is an association of friendship between people of Mozambique and those of Tanzania. We could link these associations of ordinary people from all corners of Africa and network with others for a be

they governments or our religious fora, and form a strong web to be used in bringing peace and healing to Africa. This is an opportunity!

The spirituality and faith of African people

Religious beliefs and values are a central feature of daily lives of African people. Patterns of lives have been shaped by our traditional values and beliefs and by many religions that are present in Africa. This is even more so in women who are the majority of church members in Africa. Because of this, our hope, courage and determination is alive today transcending cultures, and other barriers that could come our way in peace building. Because of the strong spirituality of the African people and especially women, we are ready to make any sacrifice that may be required for issues that are God's commandment and will to us. Just like it was for Mary when she accepted the challenge of giving birth to Jesus even though she knew that it will bring her shame and marginalization. I always compare how Mary easily accepted that huge and risky task while Moses tried to walk out of it. The stakes for Mary outnumbered those of Moses.

This is still alive today as was recently demonstrated by a woman in Johannesburg, who gave her clay at no cost after knowing that it will be used for a religious purpose despite the fact that, clay is very difficult to get in Johannesburg and it was her means of earning income to support her family. But for God, she gave her wealth. This demonstrates the readiness in African people to do whatever it takes when it is for good purpose, regardless of political, economical, social and other barriers. It is for this reason, that we have a central role in providing leadership in bringing healing and peace building to Africa. This is also where we need solidarity from sisters and brothers world-wide, because as people who have been enlightened by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we recognize opportunities for various situations that face us.

The rich and diverse composition of African people

I mentioned earlier on, of the many dialects that are found in Africa. This to me is an opportunity because we have many sources from which we could draw good experiences. Not only that, but for a long time Africa was associated with black skin. Even for me when I met African Americans or Latin American or the Caribbean's who had black skin, I immediately thought they were from Africa. I have slowly learned to unlearn this thinking. But I am now learning a new phenomena of having people with white skin and calling them Africans. For me this is another opportunity because all of us will acknowledge that the suffering that is being faced by African people has nothing to do with the colour of their skin and more importantly I hope we can all say North or South, it does not matter, this is our world, we have responsibilities for both sides. As communion of believers, and as a body of Christ, we share our burdens.

I know there are many more such opportunities which could be pointed out by every one here and beyond. Let us recognize the many opportunities that are around us, and let us make sure that they do not pass by. We are going to bring healing to ourselves as Africans because there is a lot that unites us. We are going to build peace between us and our friends from the rich countries who for many years have financed and provided arms that have perpetuated wars that have killed our people for we know there is no way with

our income we could have sustained the wars. We are going to build peace with our leaders who forgot whom they were saving. We are going to build peace with ourselves for having been quiet for all this time. We are all going to be healed.

Peace-building for Africa is healing to Africa and healing to the world. May God help us.

LITURGIES



November 14, 2002

Evening Worship: Rev. Dr Brigitte Enzner-Probst

HEALING THROUGH SPIRITUALITY

Call to Worship

Sisters from all parts of the world!
In this hour we gather in the name of our living God
Creator of the universe;
In the Name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Healer;
In the Name of the inspiring spirit
Who shows us the path of life.
Amen

Song: "Colorful Creator"

Prayer

O God, With your spirit you inspire all living things
With your spirit you plant hope and visions in the heart of women and men, old and young.
With your spirit you are present in the whole creation, in every plant and stone, in all the animals and in our brothers and sisters. The Earth is your home and you dwell there.

We come to you and pray:
See what are the blocks in our lives that resist your healing spirit from inspiring us.
Touch what is frozen,
Make straight what is bent down from many burdens
Let us stand upright and strong
As your daughters of life
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Bible Reading: Luke 13:10-17

We hear the story of the bent woman- a woman loaden with an unseen burden on her back.
A burden of many years, a burden of sorrows, of violence perhaps, the feeling of being laughed at by the young and the pretty.

Body lecture

(10 participants come forward who are ministers of the healing power of God)

Before we hear the explanations in verbs and words
Let us listen to our bodies
What do they tell us about being bent down to the earth?

Look that you have place enough around you so that you can move your arms.
Choose a partner with whom you stand together more closely.

When I am talking make the movements as it is fitting for you.
Do not do it because I tell you.
But do it as *your* body tells you.
And listen to it
Listen to the preaching inside yourself
Preaching from within.
Preaching in the bodies
Which God the creator made as the homes of our souls during our pilgrimage on
earth
The bodies
Which the Spirit needs to dwell in
as a temple
As a holy and sacred place.
So listen to your body
In respect and silence.

First of all
Feel your breath
Coming and going
Coming and going.

Then
Remember the hardship in your life
Name it
For example: frustration about a work you could not finish as you wanted.
Unhappiness- Depression
Experiencing violence in many forms
Inside and outside the community
Some of those in the churches getting stronger and stronger
Who do not want the women to be ministers
Ordained for priestly work.
Name the loneliness in your personal life
In your struggle for justice and humanity.

But there are not only individual burdens
There are collective miseries
War and crime
Coming over lives uncared for
Terrible violence and cruelty
Hopelessness and hunger
Poverty and robbery of the people by their own elite.
Speak it out- name it!
With every name

You get a burden more on your back
A heavy burden
Which is dragging you down
More and more down.

Name the burden loudly in the circle we stand here in
Name what is heavy in your life
In the life of your community you live in
What is dragging you down
Bending your back!

(Participants name various burdens bending more and more down)

When you are at the utmost bent down position
Feel the posture
Feel the pain
Stay with that for a moment
Breathing and feeling

And then
Let your whole body pray
Pray and cry for healing and new empowerment.

The healing ministers will go through the circles of the many bent down women
And touch you In the name of the healing God
Helping you to feel the inspiring and renewing spirit
Helping you to feel the presence of our healing God!

(The healing ministers go through and touch gently and lightly every woman at the back.)

And with every prayer and body cry
You feel the strength to move a little bit more up
And again a little bit more up

We pray
Lord Jesus heal me
Jesus Christ- make me whole again
Healer of our lives - take the burdens from our back
Healer of the nations- take away the burden from my people at home
Healer of the universe- see the misery in your creation- the pain of animals and plants
Take away the cruelty of human beings against them
Make us stand upright again
Your daughters
Let the spirit flow through us again

Freely and inspiring
Giving new hope and visions
Healer of the world
Heal our lives!
With those prayers
We get more and more up
Up and up
Till we stand again.

Feel your new posture
Breathing
Standing on your feet
Between earth and heaven
Daughters of the healing God
Now and forever.
Amen.

Silence *(To be seated)*

Bible Study: Ms. Jennie Nordin

Prayer of thanksgiving

O living God, Source of life inextinguishable
You are the healer in our lives
You are the spirit who gives new hope
You are the presence and joy

We thank you
That you have let us experience your strength
We thank you
That we have heard the words of promise
We thank you
That you have seen the bent woman in the Gospel
And did not forsake her
So you see us, your women now
And heal us
Through your presence
And living spirit.

We praise you in the name of Jesus
And pray together

Our father who is in heaven....

Blessing

May our words be inspired
May our bodies be the home of the spirit
May our lives be a testimony of the healing power of God.
Now and forever.
Amen.

Song: “Womb of Life, and Source of Being”

November 15, 2002

Morning Worship: Ms Abigail Zang

HEALING IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Call to Worship

Leader: We come together as the body of Christ to affirm God's vision of healing and wholeness through God's son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We come with the experience of the brokenness in our world, the hurt and conflicts so present in our relationships with one another. But we also come joyfully and thankfully in the presence of Christ Jesus, filled with the healing power of the Holy Spirit. Sisters in Christ, let us come together joyfully and thankfully to worship God!

Hymn "Spirit of the Living God"

Prayer of Confession

Leader: Lord, we confess that we have failed to follow your commandments. We have not loved you with our whole heart, mind, and soul, nor have we loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Response: Fill us with your love, Lord, that we may love you and one another.

Leader: We do not live together as people of one family, caring for others' needs and concerns before our own. We do not seek to understand each other's lives and struggles.

Response: Help us to see beyond our own needs and concerns, and reach out to one another. Help us to walk in our neighbor's shoes.

Leader: We do not forgive as you have forgiven us.

Response: Help us to remember your gifts of grace and forgiveness, and share those gifts with one another.

Leader: We allow our own prejudices to become barriers in our relationships with one another.

Response: Help us see that we are one people, your people, O God. Let us see all your children as sisters and brothers, despite age, skin color, economic class, social status, education, or any other category we use to divide "us" from "them".

Leader: We recognize that we are a broken people, in a world of broken relationships.

Response: Have mercy on us, Lord, forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Bible Study: Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari

Hymn: "Help Us Accept Each Other"

Affirmation of Faith

Leader: O God, because you are the source of all life and love and being,

People: We call you Creator, ...

Leader: Because we know the history of your presence among your covenanted people and honor the tradition,

People: We call you Lord, ...

Leader: Because our Savior, Jesus Christ, your obedient child, knew you intimately and spoke of you so,

People: We call you Father, ...

Leader: Because you are present in the act of birth and because you shelter, nurture, and care for us,

People: We call you Mother, ...

Leader: Because you hold us up and give us strength and courage when we are weak and in need,

People: We call you Sustainer, ...

Leader: Because we have known you in our pain and suffering,

People: We call you Comforter, ...

Leader: Because beyond pain lies your promise of all things made new,

People: We call you Hope, ...

Leader: Because you are the means of liberation and the way to freedom,

People: We call you Deliverer, ...

Leader: Because you have chosen to come among us and share our common lot, making the hard choices, suffering and dying; because you rose victorious, bringing new life,

People: We call you Redeemer, ...

All: Confident that you will hear, we call upon you with all the names that make you real to us, the names which create an image in our minds and hearts, an image which our souls can understand and touch. And yet, we know that you are more than all of these. Blessing and power, glory and honor be unto you, our God. Amen.

(Second National Meeting of United Church of Christ Women. Reprinted by permission of the publisher from *Women Pray*. Copyright © 1986 The Pilgrim Press.)

Prayer of the Day

Leader: God, you created us to be in relationship with you and with one another. As you invite us into relationship with you and show us these your many faces, let us also share your gifts in our relationships with others guided by your presence. Hear now our prayers for our lives together – the joy of our families and friendships, the sorrow of our broken relationships. We lift our voices with the opening words of the *Magnificat of Mary*.

Response : Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior...

Leader: We thank you for the women entrusted as leaders of the church, including those worshipping here today. We pray that your spirit continue to fill us and guide us in our ministry within our communities and throughout the world.

Response: Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior...

Leader: We rejoice in the joy our loved ones bring. We thank you for the gift of our families – our mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins. We rejoice in the lives of those who have shaped our own, through nurturing, encouragement, and support. We remember the special people in our lives, friends who support us during tough times, who laugh with us during fun times, who cry with us during the sad times, who guide us through the times when we feel lost. We thank you for the presence of these friends and loved ones.

Response: Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior...

Leader: You have called us to serve in our communities and congregations throughout the world. Fill us with your love, compassion, and steadfastness, so that we may walk alongside our brothers and sisters and support one another through the inevitable struggles and brokenness of our lives. Enable us to ease the pain of those who have lost their loved ones, those who are experiencing broken relationships through divorce or conflict, those who are facing illness, those who feel lonely, those who feel lost in their relationship with you. Give us strength to seek your healing power through one another whenever we feel lost, lonely, or broken and fill us with your presence.

Response: Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior...

Leader: God of love, remind us to love one another as you first loved us. Help us to forgive our enemies, and embrace those who have hurt us. Lead us into relationships with each other guided by your loving presence.

Response: Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior...

Leader: Lord, we offer these prayers to you, trusting in your love and mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Hymn "Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service"

Benediction

Leader: Now, go and breathe deeply,
For each breath is from God;
Go and serve gently,
For the earth and its people are fragile;
Go with energy and strength,
For God knows your every need and
God's spirit will grant you peace:

(from Peacemaking Through Worship, Volume II, edited by Jane Parker Huber, the Presbyterian Peace making Program of the Presbyterian Church, USA, 1992, p126.)

People: Thanks be to God!

November 15, 2002

Evening Worship: Ms Ruth Vince

**HEALING THROUGH COMMUNITY BUILDING –
An Anointing Liturgy³**

Opening Hymn: “Here in This Place”

Opening Prayer

Leader: Gather us in, Mysterious Maker God,
that being close to you we will understand
your intention for Creation.
Gather us in, Sweet Savior of All,
that living your ways we will create
communities of justice and peace.
Gather us in, Powerful Spirit of Renewal,
that treasuring the past we will boldly shape the future.

All: Gather us in, Holy One in Three,
that women and men together may be
the signs of your presence,
the architects of your communities,
and the witnesses to your coming.

Leader: Gather us in this day so that we might
gather strength from you. Amen.ⁱ

Lighting Of the Christ Candle

Greeting words: Christ be with you

Response: And also with you.

Silent Prayer

Receiving the Oil

³ Based on “Anointing Liturgy for a Group in an Informal Setting” prepared by Flora Litt from *Healing from the Heart: A Guide to Christian Healing for Individuals and Groups* © 1998 by Rochelle Graham, Wayne Irwin and Flora Litt, Wood Lake Books, Winfield BC Canada ³ “Gather Us In” by Kay Huggins Rio Rancho, New Mexico USA. Reproduced with permission from *Sing Out New Visions*, edited by Jean Martensen, copyright © National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1998.

Meditation

Psalm 133

Isaiah 61:1-3a; 10-11

James 5:14-15

Praise to the God of goodness and healing

Response (after the words, "We pray,") : Blessed be God.

Anointing

You are anointed in the name of God, your Creator; Jesus Christ, your Healer; and the Holy Spirit, your Sanctifier. May God's grace and peace be upon you and within you. Amen.

Hymn: "Healer of Our Every Ill"

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession**The Lord's Prayer****Sending Forth and Benediction**

November 16, 2002

Morning Worship: Lic. Aurelia Scholler

HEALING THROUGH JUSTICE

(two people read the following)

- 1.- It is so, one day, mercy and truth
- 2.- will meet together!
- 1.- Justice and peace
- 2.- will kiss each other!
- 1.- and, truth will spring forth from the earth...

Song: Lord bless the bread you have given (*Bendice, Señor Nuestro Pan*)

(Invitation is given to the community to sing invoking the God of Life. And inviting all to be conscious that justice bears fruits making life in all its fullness possible for all).

Presentation at the altar:

(Prepare the altar in the middle of a circle formed by the participants)

(Colored material is placed on the floor)

Participant I: . I bring to our celebration colored material representing the love of God to be with us.

(A receptacle is brought with soil.)

Participant II: I bring to our mother the earth, the only one with capability to create all and purify all. Primary matrix of life.

(Branches are then offered)

Participant III : I bring these branches as a symbol of love to my neighbor, with justice as an instrument, to bring here and to the world the fruits of fullness of life for everyone.

Leader:: In front of the altar, in the presence of God who has created us, we are conscious of God's promise in Genesis. 9 not to destroy any more life and the cycle of the earth, and of God's promise of eternal blessing.

Leader: Until today God has kept God's promises. The fruits of the earth are abundant. However, too many persons in the world are deprived of bread, work, health, house. They receive only the fruits of injustice: hunger, violence, war, banishment...Injustice is the instrument of condemnation. We confess:

(Song:) Let us break bread together on our knees (2)

When I fall down on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Bible Study: Luke 18:2-8. Rev. Patricia Cuyatti

Prayer:

(the officiating person invites to pray God to send the Holy Spirit to help us all the participants to be branches which only give fruits of justice).

We plead with you O God, to equip us be instrument of justice for the healing of the world. Allow us to be the branches which bear fruits of equity, human rights, peace, just distribution of wealth in accordance with need and freedom. We beg you for the healing of the world creating, practicing, constructing, sustaining, recreating and recreating justice for ever. Make real what has been announced by the prophet Isaiah: till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of justice will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest. Amen.

Benediction: (symbol of a rainbow is given to all the participants showing that God does not want destruction of the world. Benediction is given with the gesture of our hands on someone's head, then on her shoulders and then embracing each person on the side while singing)

Song: God bless you, God protect you, God give you peace, God give you peace.

Dios te bendiga, Dios te proteja, Dios te de la paz, Dios te de la paz.

November 16, 2002

Evening Worship: Ms Esther Lam

HEALING THROUGH RITUALS

(Those gathered for the healing service will remove their shoes and sit in a circle).

SILENCE

(The light is turned off, all the participants sit in a circle in darkness to represent our spiritual situation)

SOUNDING OF THE BELL

(The sound of the bell represents the oneness of God, and the presence of God with all creation)

(Candles and Oil will be brought into the circle at this time. The candles will be lit.)

INVOCATION

Leader : We gather this evening as people of God.
God our Creator....

All : Be present now and bless us.

Leader : God our Savior.....

All : Be present now to forgive us.

Leader : God our Sustainer.....

All : Be present now to inspire and comfort us. Amen.

SONG "Saranam Saranam Saranam"

THE CIRCLE

Leader : We come together in a circle of healing.

The circle has no beginning and no end;

All : It represents God as the eternal One.

Leader : The planets and the stars which God created are circular;

All : The circle reminds us that we are a part of God's creation.

Leader : The Earth circles the sun, giving us days and nights, seasons, and years;

All : The circle reminds us to praise God for providing us in every moment of our lives.

Leader : The crown of thorns upon the head of Jesus was a circle;

All : The circle reminds us to give thanks for Jesus's death on our behalf.

Leader : The stone that was rolled away from Jesus's tomb was a circle;

All : The circle reminds us to give thanks for Jesus' s resurrection and our own new birth.

Leader : The bread and the cup, representing Jesus 's body and blood, are circular;

All : The circle reminds us that we are part of the body of Christ, along with Christians of all times and in all places.

Leader : The circle represents wholeness and health;

All : We come into the circle this evening, along with our sisters, believing that the Lord meets us here, and heals us.

SILENT PRAYER

Leader : In this time of silent prayer, we wait for the Lord to speak to us.

SOUNDING OF THE BELL

SONG: Loving Spirit

READING: Luke 5 : 17-26

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone? "

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, ' Get up and walk' ? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, " I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God.

They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

SONG: (Jesus asks 'Who do you say I am?') (*Jesu neem un nu gu shin ga*).

STORY TELLING

PRAYER FOR HEALING

Leader : Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am weak.

All : Lord, heal me, and make me whole in mind and body, in soul and spirit

Leader : Come and receive the healing touch of the Lord

*(Participants go to any of the persons who stand and have oil in their hands.
The persons will draw a cross in the forehead of the participants and say:
" God forgives you, heals you and makes you whole."*

BENEDICTION

Leader: Use the following words to bless each other together

All : May the light of peace and justice shine upon us,
and inspire us to use our powers to heal and not to harm,
to empower and not to control,
to bless and not to curse,
to serve you. O God of Healing.

SONG "God of Peace" "*Yarabba ssalami*"

November 17, 2002

Morning Eucharist Worship: Ms Loe Rose Mbise

HEALING THROUGH BUILDING PEACE

1. Prelude - African Choruses

Leader: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: AMEN.

Leader: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All : AMEN.

2. Confession

Leader: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(A minute's silence)

All: Most merciful God

Leader: We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against You in thought, Word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your Holy Name. AMEN.

3. Absolution

Leader: Almighty God in the mercy, has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake forgive us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of christ and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy spirit.

4. Opening song: Come O Holy Spirit Come "Wa Wa Wa Emimimo"

5. The Kyrie

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Spirit be with you all.

All: And also with you.

Leader: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: For the peace from above, and for our salvation,
let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being
of the church of God, and for the unity of all, let us
pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: For this Holy house, and for all who offer here their
worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Help, save, comfort, and defend us gracious Lord.

All: AMEN.

HYMN OF PRAISE

HALLELUJAH! WE SING YOUR PRAISES

CHORUS

Hallelujah! We sing your praises; all our hearts are filled with gladness.
Hallelujah! We sing your praises; all our hearts are filled with gladness.

1. Christ the Lord to us said
I am bread, I am wine
I am bread, I am wine

CHORUS

2. Go forth and spread the news-Christ the Lord is risen

Christ the Lord is risen indeed. Christ the Lord is risen.

3. Now he sends us all out, strong in faith, free of doubt,
Strong in faith, free of doubt. Tell to all the joyful Gospel.

6. Prayer of the day:

Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Leader: Let us pray.....Through Christ our Lord.

All: AMEN.

7. Scripture Reading

First Reading: Psalm

8. Song "Rakanaka Vhengeri"

Gospel Reading: Luke 19:41-42-

9. Sermon: Ms. Loe Rose Mbise

10. Hymn of the day: "Here O God, Thy Servants Gather"

11. Apostles' Creed:

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the Forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. AMEN.

12. Prayers / sharing of peace

13. Offertory hymn: O Healing River, Send Down Your Waters".

14. The great Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts

We lift them to the Lord

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

All: It is right to give God thanks and praise

Leader: It is indeed right and salutary ... we praise
Your name and join their unending hymn.

All: Alleluia joy ! Alleluia joy
Alleluia joy
When we meet on that day
Joy ! Joy ! Joy Alleluia
Joy Alleluia Joy
When we meet on that day.

15. The Lord's Prayer:

Leader: Let us pray the Lord's Prayer in our own languages.

All: (praying the Lord's Prayer)
AMEN.

16. Holy Communion

17. Benediction:

May God our Mother and Father invite you
To walk also on the muddy streets to find the forgotten gates
To go and visit the shelters of those who have no place in an inn.

So that you never forgetm (S)He will be born again-not in the meeting rooms of
jerusalems, but in the bethlehems of your country;
In the corners of our common global village, in the nazareths of today.

May Christ our risen brother encourage you to teach like him,
Taking your vocabulary from the kitchen and from the fields;
To heal like him, hearing the tears nearby the tomb,
Asking, touching, making space to act like him
Acknowledging the rights of everyone, arguing justice, calling for peace.

May the Holy Spirit, our never ending resource remind you
That not all that is important is expressed loudly in big words, in high numbers,
But also seeks ways in silence, in basence, in vulnerable moments.

May God in all the different forms welcome all your steps in your ministry
And greet you also in a desert, in the tides of the ocean, in the suffering and in the
shared joy.

(by Irja Askola, From Sing out New Visions, ed. Jean Martensen, published by Augsburg Fortress,
Minneaplis, Minnesota, USA. Page 36)

18. Closing Song: "Freedom is Coming, Freedom is Coming".

LWF Pre Assembly Women's Gathering: For the Healing of the World

14-17, November, Montreux, Switzerland

Schedule

TIME	Thursday 14 November	Friday 15 November	Saturday 16 November	Sunday 17 November	18 November
08:30		<p>Worship Led by Young women. Coordinator: Ms. Abigail Zang Bible Study: Rev. Dr. Prasanna Kumari, Vice President, LWF Healing in Interpersonal relationships</p>	<p>Worship: Latin American and the Caribbean Region Coordinator: Lic Aurelia Scholler Bible study : Rev. Patricia Cuyatti, President, IEP Topic: Healing through Justice</p>	<p>9:00 A.M. Eucharist/ Worship: African Region Coordinator: Rev. Marie Barnett Preacher: Ms. Loe Rose Mbise Topic: Healing through building Peace</p>	
09:30		<p>PLENARY For the Healing of the World: A Theological Impetus: Rev. Dr. Isabelle Grätsle, Moderator, Protestant Church of Geneva Contextual Challenges: Dr. Musimbi Kanyaro, World YWCA. General Discussions</p>	<p>PLENARY Panel Presentation of Village Groups 1-5 - God's Healing Gift of Justification: Facilitator: Rev. Dr Eva Vogel-Mafato, CEC - God's Healing Gift of Communion: Rev. Dr Karen Bloomquist, DTS - Healing Divisions within the one Church: Rev. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth WARC - Mission of the Church in multi-faith contexts: Dr Aruna Gnanadason, WCC - Removing Barriers that exclude: Ms. Tania Engel, South Africa</p>		
10:30		BREAK	BREAK		
11:00		<p>PLENARY Greetings: Dr. Ishmael NOKO, General Secretary, LWF Dr. Rasolondralbe, Director, DMD WICAS: Presentation Sharing by Regional coordinators</p>	<p>Discussion in groups and preparation for group presentation</p>	<p>PLENARY Sharing of Village Group Reports</p>	
12:30		LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	
14:00		<p>Regional Discussions with Area Desk Secretaries on "Common concerns and Regional strategies"</p>	<p>Panel Presentation of Village Groups 6-10 - The Church's Healing Ministry: Ms. Tamara Tatsenko, Russia - Justice and Healing in Families: Ms. Inger Lise Olsen, Sweden - Overcoming Violence: Ms. Linda-Post Bushkofsky, USA - Transforming Economic Globalization: Ms. Sandra Bach, Germany - Healing Creation: Ms. Katia Maria Cortez, Nicaragua</p>	<p>14:00: PLENARY Women Speak for the Healing of the World. Proposals to the LWF 15:00 Closing Worship by team of participants</p>	
15:30		BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	
16:00		<p>Plenary: Regional Group Sharing</p>	<p>Discussion in groups and preparation for group presentation</p>		
17:30	<p>Opening Worship: European Region Worship coordinator: Dr. Brigitte Enzner-Probst Bible study: Jennie Nordin Topic: Healing through Spirituality</p>	<p>Evening worship: North American Region Coordinator: Ms. Ruth Vince Healing through Community Building</p>	<p>Evening Worship Asian Region Ms. Esther Lam Healing through rituals in Asian Christian tradition</p>		
18:30		DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	
<p>Cultural Evening: Coordinator: Márta Pinter Brebovszky</p>					
Departures					

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Montreux, Geneva, Nov 14-17,2002

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